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VALENTINE'S EVE.

BY

MRS. OPIE.



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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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VOL. III.

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## VALENTINE'S EVE.

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### CHAPTER I.

AFTER a sleepless night, Lord Shirley set out for his country seat—a magnificent but rambling old mansion, one wing of which was fitted up for Lady Shirley's sole use. The last room in this suite had a bow-window, and commanded a very fine prospect ; and though a public road ran along the side of the lawn on which it looked, it was hidden by a thick shrubbery. In this room were Catherine's musical instruments, in the next were her books and pencils, and in the first room of the suite she usually sat to work ; that

room communicated with her bed-room and dressing-room.

As soon as Lord Shirley arrived, which he did in a most perturbed state of mind, and not before it was nearly dark, he ran up to Catherine's apartments. As he approached the last room of the suite, he listened, for he was sure he heard a man's voice, and in rather a loud tone. Again he heard it, and ran forward: but as he had trodden very heavily and his boots made a noise, Catherine heard him, came out to meet him in evident agitation, and turning the key which was in the lock, put it in her pocket.

"My dear lord," said she in rather a loud tone, "I did not expect you to-night."

"So it seems, madam;—but pray what curiosity have you gotten in that apartment? you can't suppose that I shall not be anxious to see it!"

"It

“It is no curiosity,” replied Catherine turning as pale as death and trembling in every limb, yet listening as she did so.

“I will tell you what it is,” said Lord Shirley grasping her arm with frightful eagerness; “it is a man that you have locked in there—I heard his voice; and I believe that man to be Melvyn!”

“Melvyn! would it were!” cried Catherine.

“Audacious woman! give me the key, or my foot shall burst the door open.”

“O stay, hold—for your own sake hold, if not for mine;—you will repent, indeed you will.”

Lord Shirley heard no more, but with one application of his foot burst the door open, while Catherine conjured him to show mercy to what he saw. But when on entering the room she saw no one there, she audibly thanked her Creator.

“Lady Shirley,” cried the earl almost  
E 2
frantic

frantic with conflicting passions, "I have thought you pure as an angel, though there was some mystery attached to your story before you knew me."

"My lord, think me so still, spite of appearances, or you will live to repent it."

"I cannot live and think you otherwise; and yet I must, I do.... But, madam, I am no longer to be trifled with, and we part this hour unless you tell me who was shut up with you in that apartment, and this very instant, no doubt, escaped by the window."

Lady Shirley paused for a moment. At length she said, "All that I can tell you, my lord, consistent with my duty, I will: There was a man with me, and I would not have had you see him on any account; as, if you had done your duty, you must have seized him; and if you had conquered him, you must then have committed him and condemned him probably



bably to a disgraceful punishment, if not to death ; for he is a deserter from your regiment."

"How ! a deserter from my regiment shut up with you—and you desirous of preserving his life ! What can you have to do with a person of his description ?—Who is he, madam ? answer me that."

"Not now—I cannot, I dare not, must not ; for I am bound not to do it, by the most solemn of oaths ; and you know me too well, not to know that no risk to myself—nay, no inducement whatever, can make me break an oath pledged to my God."

"But can't you be absolved from your oath ?"

"Yes—I hope so."

"And can't you request to be so ?"

"Yes, I have requested it over and over again, and lately more strongly than ever.

But

But in the meanwhile, my dear lord, you must promise me to believe that appearances only are against me."

"I know not what to think—this is a most incredible story: What evidence do you offer me of the truth?"

"'Time was,'" said Catherine mournfully, "when my word was sufficient;—but Mr. Melvyn can testify that—"

"Melvyn testify! And is he then in your confidence?—do you let him partake in the secret, spite of your pretended vow, that you conceal from your husband?"

"How can you know me so little? I really blush to be forced to defend myself from so vile a charge. Mr. Melvyn knows nothing from *me*, but circumstances have given him some light on this mysterious affair; and he knows this poor wretch personally, though he is ignorant  
of

of his name and situation, except that he is a deserter from your regiment."

"Ha! light breaks in upon me too:—this man, I suppose, was the cause of your illness on the birth-day?"

"He was—I feared that you would see him and recognise him."

"And he was the man in the balcony too?"

"He was."

"But still, why should *you* feel such deep interest in him? Was he ever your lover?"

"My dearest lord," cried Catherine hastily, "pray ask me no more questions on this subject now: in time you will, I trust, know every thing, and that burthen be removed from my mind, which has weighed on it ever since we married. In the mean time I conjure you to confide in me implicitly."

"Nay, that is now no longer possible;  
for

for there are other appearances so strongly against you!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes—and—" At this moment the servant came in to say that Mr. Melvyn had just called at the door on horseback, to tell them that he had seen a man let himself down from the bow-window at the back of the house; and he thought it right to let the family know.

Lord Shirley on hearing this stood the picture of agony and dismay.

"Did not Mr. Melvyn ask for us?—Is he gone without coming in?"

"No, my lady—he only said what I tell you. I told him that my lord was come, and he rode off at full speed."

"Leave us," said Lord Shirley in a hoarse voice.—"Lady Shirley, Melvyn's knocking at my gate at this hour, and so soon after the disappearance of a man from the window, who was shut up with  
you,

you, convinces me, though I believe fully in the existence of the other man, that Melvyn and the man who disappeared are the same person."

"My lord!" cried Catherine vehemently, "you do not, you cannot, you dare not think it! When did I ever deceive you? When did I ever, by even an unguarded look, or word, or action, call my virtue or even my innocence in question?"

"I own you have been very *guarded*. Unguarded! no, no—but I declare, like poor Othello, while I look at you, 'If thou be false, then heaven does mock itself!'" Then bursting into tears he rushed out of the room; and an hour after, Catherine's maid came to say that Lord Shirley was gone to bed with a very bad headache; and, that he might not be disturbed, he would sleep in the green room.

"He has done wisely," said Catherine, commanding herself. But when alone, the agonies of her heart almost threatened for a moment to upset her reason: but prayer, the comfort, the hope, the support and the balm of the confiding Christian, soothed at length her unquiet mind to rest; and leaning on the "Rock of Ages," she, at a late hour having undressed herself, not choosing to be seen in such evident grief by her servant, betook herself to her bed, where sleep at length visited her.

Not so Lord Shirley; to him sleep was a stranger. But being convinced, the more he considered, that it was more likely Catherine's story was true, than that Melvyn, if he had been the person locked up in the room, should have dared to come to the house,—he resolved to believe as he wished, and went in search of Catherine in order to interrogate her respecting her morning walks.

He

He found her pale, languid, spiritless ; but calm, dignified, and kind. It was some minutes before Lord Shirley could speak. At length he said, " I believe I was very hasty in my opinion last night, and I am sorry for it ; but judge for yourself, if I have not some excuse for my conduct."

He then related to her what he had heard at Sophia Clermont's : and when he had ended, Catherine with a most placid smile replied, " My dear lord, would I could clear up all your other suspicions as easily as I can clear up this !" She then, with all the warmth of a generous nature delighting to expatiate on benevolent actions, described Melvyn's visits and hers to the same staircase and for the same purposes. But when she related the scene of Melvyn's being discovered by her reading the Bible to the poor sick family, Lord Shirley, angry as he was, could



could not help laughing aloud ; nor could he help suspecting that Melvyn, having known of Catherine's visits, was only acting a part in order to prejudice her in his favour. But the *bonhomme* with which Catherine related this story, believing in Melvyn's charity as firmly as in her own, and the serene and sweet expression of her countenance, completely for a while laid the foul fiend in his soul ; and assuring her that he believed her statement implicitly, and had resumed his confidence in her, he earnestly conjured her to forgive him his past violence and injustice. Pardon was then mutually exchanged, and peace restored. Still the deserter haunted Lord Shirley's fancy. He feared that Catherine had loved before she knew him, and had loved unworthily ; and wretched and outcast as this being was, he feared that he would prove an object of envy and of jealousy to him through life.

After



After a few days of quiet, if not of perfect happiness, during which the presence of the children was often of great use in preventing them from feeling that their *têtes-à-têtes* were not quite so delightful as formerly, they returned to London.

It was now near the last week in June; and Lord Shirley, having appointed to meet Sophia Clermont and a friend of hers, a great amateur painter, at the Exhibition the day on which it was to close, went to Somerset House at the time agreed on. But at the door Sophia's servant put a note into his hand, saying she feared that she could not come at all—certainly not for an hour after the time appointed. Lord Shirley however went in, that he might see his family picture for the last time in that place.

The room was very crowded, and the company not very select; but Lord Shirley, immersed in thought, was gazing fondly on the likeness of Catherine, when

two vulgar-looking young men came and stood just before him ; and as they evidently came to look at the picture, he was induced to listen to their remarks.

“ Egad, Dick, ’tis very like her,” said the one to the other ; “ the same demure look she always had, as if butter would not melt in her mouth.”

“ Yes, and I find she hums people now with her sanctification ; but we know that when she chose to unbend, she was a fine funny girl—How she used to run on ! To be sure she was always well-born ; still I never thought Kitty Shirley would be a countess, I always thought Jack Lawson would get her at last.”

“ Aye, so did I, for he was devilish fond of her ; and once when I said ‘ Kitty Shirley,’ says I, ‘ is not as handsome neither as Lucy Merle,’ I thought he would have knocked me down.”

“ Indeed ! Well, they were both fine creatures.

creatures.—And how they used to like to walk in the streets and show themselves!—You remember that Melvyn that followed them home once.”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, what do you think? If I did not see him come out of a shabby yard the other day with the countess,—I am sure it was she.”

“ Well, and what then? He was always after her, you know; and why should a countess be more coy than a private gentlewoman?”

“ Right; and who should I see looking after them but Charlotte Wright,—you know whom I mean? ‘Do you see them?’ said she. ‘They often meet in my room: goodness led them here first, but badness makes them continue their visits; and as they pay me well, it is no business of mine.’”

On hearing this, Lord Shirley could be  
contented

contented to remain silent no longer ; yet being inarticulate from strong emotion, a gentleman, as he appeared to be, came between the young men and the earl as he was about to seize the arm of one of them, and saying to them “ What have you done? Lord Shirley has heard all you said :” the two youths pushed their way violently through the crowd ; and though Lord Shirley followed them directly, he utterly lost sight of them. The truth was, the young men were creatures of Melvyn and tutored by him, he having learnt from Sophia the exact moment when Lord Shirley would be at the Exhibition ; and they had little doubt but that he would go up stairs, even if she did not come. The seeming gentleman who interfered to tell the youths the exact moment when to escape, was also one of his tools ; and he was well served by all three.

When

When Lord Shirley recovered himself, his first resolve was to go home and relate to Catherine all he had heard, and describe the persons of the speakers. He did so, to her amazement and consternation. Still, when she heard herself talked of under the name of *Kitty Shirley*, she could scarcely help giving way to laughter.

“ My dear lord,” said she, “ this must have been what they call a *hoax*; for can you at any time of my life fancy me looking like a *Kitty Shirley*, or liable to be called so? Now do look at my solemn demure face, as the youth said, my Madonna hair, my tall person, and my erect not to say lofty carriage, and ask yourself whether it was ever likely I could be known by the name of *Kitty Shirley* ?”

“ Why, indeed it seems improbable.”

‘ Oh! depend on it, these fellows knew you; and having heard some reports and  
some

some names, they made up this conversation in order to hoax you."

"But who is Jack Lawson?"

Catherine blushed; but said she knew no such person as Jack Lawson.

"And who is Charlotte Wright?"

"There is a woman of that name amongst the poor whom I visit." And when she said this a dark cloud passed across Lord Shirley's brow.

"Then you see," said he, "in one name, nay in two, they were right, for they were right in Melvyn's name. This is a very strange, mysterious business!" And without taking any leave of Catherine he went out to see if Sophia Clermont was returned home. But in his way he met an express coming for him, to tell him that an old friend of his father's was dying, thirty miles from town, and wished to see him: and desiring the man to go and inform Lady Shirley, he mounted his horse to ride

ride it as far as the first stage, and set off at full speed.

“And he is gone without returning for one moment to bid me farewell!” cried Catherine, when she heard of her lord’s departure. “Time was when no consideration would have led him to do this! But I loved him too well; his image did sometimes steal between me and my Creator, and it is only right that I should be made to suffer in that by which I have offended.”

It was Saturday evening, and Lady Shirley had promised to *chaperone* a young lady to the Opera, on condition that she might consign her to the care of another lady at an early hour, as she always made a point of quitting the opera on a Saturday night before the last ballet, that her servants and household might be in bed early enough to rise and get their work done time enough to go to church. This young lady and the *chaperone* who  
came



came to replace Catherine were both, unluckily for her, friends of Melvyn; and he consequently came into the box to speak to them. Catherine did not know how to act :—she could not bear to tell him that her lord was jealous of him, and beg him to go away, nor did she like to own to him that the censorious world had joined their names improperly.

It was now approaching eleven; and Catherine, who was really ill from the wretchedness of her mind, and to whom her lord's coldness and sudden departure were continually present, resolved to stay no longer; but unfortunately no one was in the box whom she could ask to convey her to her carriage but Melvyn, who seeing her turn very pale entreated to be allowed to look for her servants.

Catherine blushed with painful emotion, and faintly articulated "No—I cannot think of troubling you."

"I see



“I see how it is,” said Melvyn lowering his voice, “Oh! Lady Shirley, are you aware how your reluctance to let me have the honour of conducting you to your carriage flatters my self-love? Dear and respected lady, be more just to yourself, and do not let your health suffer from scruples and fears so unworthy of you.”

Plausible as was this reasoning, Catherine at first was not influenced by it: but at length increasing indisposition obliged her to say that she would trouble him to call up her carriage: and till he returned, she sat back in the box hiding her face and complaining of a bad headache.

At length he returned; and while leaning on his arm he led her through the as yet empty promenade, he knew that Sir Harry Turton, the curious young man who had watched Catherine into her house, was  
lounging

lounging in their path, and would probably follow them and observe their conduct, as his suspicions of their intimacy were fully awakened and had been communicated to others. Melvyn was too well acquainted with the characters of those with whom he lived, and with human nature in general, to be frequently, if *ever* wrong in his calculations, and he saw Sir Harry follow and watch them to the door. There, instead of her carriage, Lady Shirley found only Melvyn's servant, who said, if they would walk a little way, he would lead them to it, as it could not get up, and the way to it was clear and not dirty. Lady Shirley, who would not have felt rain nor heeded lightning, so much was her mind absorbed in her own wretchedness, and whose only desire was to get home and leave a scene so ill fitted to tranquillize a mind like hers, expressed her readiness to follow the man : but after walking  
ing

ing as far as Coventry Street, no carriage was to be seen, and the man expressed his belief that the coachman, being impatient, had driven down to the Opera House. Melvyn seeing Sir Harry still in sight asked Catherine what she would do, suggesting that it would be unpleasant to her probably, with only him for her escort, to go back and meet all the company coming out, and that it would therefore be better, perhaps, for them to walk on till they could meet a hackney coach, into which he would put her, (his servant remaining with her,) and then go and find her carriage. Catherine consented to all he proposed, as she had a great terror of being seen by the company with him alone, after all that had passed, and Lord Shirley's jealousy;—and on they walked towards Grosvenor Square, Sir Harry still following. But the footman,  
having

having his cue from his master, dropped behind and left them, not unobserved by Sir Harry. It was now beginning to rain, and Lady Shirley had nothing on but a white lace veil. Melvyn therefore earnestly conjured her to let him borrow for her a hat and a shawl at a chamber milliner's whose door they were then passing, where he was well known; and Catherine leaned against the door-post while he went and borrowed a large straw bonnet and a thick shawl, which he assisted her to put on; and they then resumed their walk. All this Sir Harry saw, much to the delight of his curiosity; but, to do him justice, greatly to the distress of his better feelings.

At length they turned into one particular street, and Sir Harry's heart began to beat with violence; for he saw Melvyn  
direct

direct his steps towards one side of the way. At this moment the rain fell violently; but the wicked man, the curious man, and the suffering woman were regardless of its violence. Catherine, indeed, from illness was now nearly past feeling, and her weakness made easy to her destroyer what he might otherwise have found difficult; namely, to execute his plan of getting her, in sight of a witness, the curious Sir Harry, into a *disreputable house*.

He had led her to the door, and was going to advise her resting for a moment in the house they were passing, which, he said, belonged to a friend of his, but who with his family was then in the country, when her feet failed her; and she sunk against his shoulder. Melvyn instantly rang the bell: the ready porter opened, and the door of infamy closed on the innocent Catherine. Melvyn had accomplished what he wished.

Lady Shirley's pure fame was blasted, he trusted; and even her doting lord would believe the tale of her guilt after this appearance, and he had it in contemplation to confirm her frailty to the earl in a manner which he could not doubt. "And then," thought he, "Shirley is rendered miserable, she is lost to *him*, and I am amply revenged! Yes, Shirley, in one instance, at least, you have not triumphed over me with impunity!"

Sir Harry, meanwhile, almost doubting the evidence of his senses, was still watching the door of the house, having first with some difficulty convinced himself that he had not mistaken the number: but he found that he had not, and his heart bled for the unhappy and injured husband.

It was long before Catherine recovered herself entirely; and when she did so, she was surprised to see that no woman waited on her, but that the wine and the water  
were

were brought by a man. But, vile as Melvyn was, he could not bear that a being so pure as Catherine should be waited upon, or even exposed to the sight of the abandoned of her own sex.

It was near an hour before Catherine was well enough to be moved; and when she was so, at her earnest desire Melvyn went for a coach; while she remained in a very neat room, which by its appearance could excite no suspicions in her mind. When he went out he saw Sir Harry at a little distance, and in company with another gentleman. This was better and better for his designs; and having procured a coach by good luck which had just set down a fare, he came in it into the street, but desired it to draw up to one corner. He then let himself out; not at all doubting but that when he was re-entered into the house the spies would go and take the number of the coach. Ca-



therine now gladly suffered Melvyn to lead her to the coach ; and the two spies standing in a dark corner of the street near it, saw her enter it supported by Melvyn, whom she forbade to accompany her. And Melvyn having pretended to speak “Grosvenor Square” in a low voice, but loud enough to be overheard by the two gentlemen, ran hastily to Sophia Clermont’s house to relate to her the complete success of all his stratagems.

The gentlemen who had witnessed this scene of apparent guilt were far from having such exulting feelings. The one who had joined Sir Harry, and had inquired what he was doing there, was a most respectable nobleman, the friend of Lord Shirley, just returned from an embassy, and who in consequence of his long absence from England had seen Catherine only twice, and then only in public. But the beauty of her figure, and that of her hand and  
arm,



arm, was so very striking, that any one who had once seen them could swear with safety to their identity wherever they were again beheld; and this beautiful hand and arm, by the pale light of a lamp, Lord M—— had seen ungloved resting on Melvyn's shoulder as he put her into the coach. This proof that he beheld Lady Shirley was not wanted:—still it satisfied Lord M—— yet more of her identity, and he believed that it was his duty to tell Lord Shirley what he had unwillingly witnessed. He also blamed Sir Harry for not showing himself, to prevent her entering the house. “Perhaps,” said he, “she was innocent till then, though not in intention, and your appearance might have saved her from perdition!” But Sir Harry after what he had before seen was of a different opinion, and he brought Lord M—— over to be of the same opinion with himself.

When

When the hackney coach reached Grosvenor Square, the man stopped, and desired to know where he was to set down. Catherine told him, at Lord Shirley's. And could she have seen his countenance, when, on her removing the hat and shawl, he saw by her dress and appearance that it was a Lady whom he had taken up under such suspicious circumstances, she would have been perplexed to understand the expression of it. At length she saw herself at her own door, and the porter immediately answered the vulgar rap of the coachman.

"It is my lady, and in a hack!" cried the porter, while her own gentleman ran to assist her out of the coach.

"Burton, is the carriage returned yet?"

"No, my lady."

"I missed it strangely," said the unconscious

scious Catherine as she got out: "one of you must go and say that I am come home."

The coachman gave a sort of a hem, and looked sly. "My fare is seven shillings, my lady," said he.

"Seven shillings!" said Burton.

"Pay him what he asks," said Catherine, "it is a wet night."

The coachman concluded that she did this to prevent questions being asked, and he had asked double his fare, being sure that the sum would not be disputed. And Burton did as he was ordered; though wondering to see his lady come home alone and without a servant in such a vehicle, and holding a straw bonnet and a shawl in her hand.

"This was some charity scheme of hers, I'll lay my life," said Burton to the porter: for to suspect his lady, and such a lady, of any thing wrong would have been in Burton's eyes little better than sacrilege;

crilege;—and the porter agreed with him. Catherine's maid was equally astonished, and equally candid, even though she saw the bonnet and shawl, and also the dragged state of her lady's clothes: but respect being banished by surprise, she exclaimed, "Dear me, my lady! where can you have been, and where did you get that vulgar hat and handkerchief?"

Catherine now recollected that some explanation was indeed necessary. And as she began to narrate what had happened, she saw that the tale she had to tell was so odd and so suspicious, especially as she must tell it also to a jealous husband, that she became confused; she hesitated, she turned pale; she broke off suddenly—and at last, complaining of great giddiness in her head, she threw herself on the sofa: there, though she did not absolutely lose her senses, she lay for some time without the power of motion, and when

She

she retired to bed, to sleep was, she found, impossible.

The next day she was a little relieved in mind by receiving a short though cold letter from Lord Shirley, and evidently written under suppressed feelings: and Catherine, who now saw every thing through a jaundiced eye, was but too conscious of the change in his style. But his letter conveyed one piece of information which was important and interesting to many persons, from different causes. He announced in it his intention of returning the next day.—In two days at most, then, Lord M—— knew that his must be the painful task of imparting to Lord Shirley the suspicions and damning circumstance which he had witnessed. Sophia and Melvyn knew that the last destroying blow was now about to be given to the reputation of Catherine and the peace of Lord Shirley. And Catherine knew,

though pure even of intentional error, that she was going to appear under circumstances of a very suspicious nature before a jealous and irritated judge.—Perhaps none of these parties slept well that night. But at length the dreaded, the desired, the eventful morrow arrived.

## CHAPTER II.

LORD Shirley reached London the next day about noon, having left the gentleman recovering to whom he had been summoned. But he had crossed Westminster Bridge before he had determined whether it would be better for him to go home first, or not see Lady Shirley till he had endeavoured by means of Miss Clermont to clear up to his satisfaction the suspicions infused into his mind by some of the strange conversation that he had overheard at Somerset House.

At length, however, he resolved to go to Sophia first, as he felt afraid of meeting the eye of Catherine till he could gaze on her again with pleasure, and make her amends for having left her without one single adieu, by returning to her with  
renewed



renewed confidence and unabated affection. He found Sophia at home and alone, and not a little pleased to find that he had come to her before he went to see Catherine. But she soon found that it was jealousy of his wife, not regard for her, that led him to her, and the thought steeled her heart against his evident distress.

Lord Shirley, unable to disclose to any one a conversation that inculpated and degraded Catherine, which what he had overheard most certainly did, asked Sophia with an air of assumed indifference, whether she had heard the name of the street in which Melvyn's stable-keeper lived, and of the mews whence the countess and Melvyn were seen coming out. Sophia named both, having heard them from Sir Harry Turton.—Lord Shirley soon after made an excuse for leaving her, and resolved to satisfy his mind by going



going in search of Charlotte Wright. Charlotte Wright was well known, and her apartment soon found; but she was not within, being, as a little girl informed him, gone to visit a poor family higher up the stairs.

“ I will follow her thither,” said Lord Shirley, “ I dare say I shall be able to find her.” And as he spoke he ascended the stairs; for he recollected that Melvyn visited one family on the staircase, and perhaps Charlotte was gone to them.

He was quite correct in his conjecture; and on asking for one Charlotte Wright, she answered from an adjoining room, and opened the door. The persons were so like the description which Catherine had given, that Lord Shirley had no doubt he was right; and he asked Charlotte if this was the family whom Mr. Melvyn visited.

Charlotte, who was prepared for this  
visit

visit by Melvyn, and also *for* questions, and *with* answers, replied in the affirmative. But the poor sick man observed, "Yes, the gentleman to be sure was very good ; but since that sweet young lady has not come to see neighbour Smith, he has not come near me."

"What young lady?"

"Oh ! a young lady, a countess, I believe," said Charlotte, lowering her voice: "but I cannot talk about her here, nor indeed at all."

"Oh, such a sweet lady !" cried the wife, "I am sure I should not wonder if all the world came to look at her ; and yet, though the gentleman might come oftener on her account, he came at first without knowing that she was here."

"Aye, wife ; you are ready enough to speak up for the gentleman, for he is a handsome gentleman, that's the truth on it ; and so the lady thought, for I sha'n't forget

forget how she smiled upon him, and called him her good friend."

Lord Shirley started, and thought he had no more business in that room. Therefore putting a dollar in the wife's hand, and telling Charlotte that his business was with her, he led the way down stairs with that *serrement de cœur* which jealousy alone can give.

When he reached Charlotte's humble room, he closed the door, and asked her if she had really uttered the words which the young men had repeated. And Charlotte, affecting to be confused and to hesitate, said that she was afraid to speak, for fear she should get anger from Mr. Melvyn; and to be sure she must say he paid her well,—but—

"Paid you for what?"

"Dear me! your honour speaks so sharp, you frighten me.—Why, you see, when the lady and Mr. Melvyn came down  
from

from seeing the poor folks up stairs, they used to come in here; and you know, sir, though we poor folks are poor, we are neither blind nor deaf; and I soon saw that those grandees liked to be together, and so I used to leave them."

"What here?"

"Yes."

"Distraction!" cried Lord Shirley, and rushed out of the room like a madman: but coming back to the door, he said "Well, woman, go on."

"Lord! your honour, why should you take on so? I am sure I meant to insinuate nothing improper, I dare say madam's as innocent as I am."

Lord Shirley looked at her fiercely, and the word "Strumpet!" almost burst from his lips—"Go on," he cried.

"Well, sir; at last the neighbours did not like the look of it, and they said I must not let the grandees come  
into

into my room ; and so I told them, and they took it very kindly ; and so after staying only a little while up stairs with the poor folks, to what they used to do, they used to walk away together, but where they went to I can't pretend for to say."

" There," said Lord Shirley, throwing her some money, " there !" and darted down the street.

" But can this be real ?" said he to himself, " Is not this woman a suborned witness? — *Suborned* by whom, and for what ? It were madness to suppose it ; — and that she likes Melvyn and dotes upon his conversation I well know — To be sure, their intercourse might not be criminal ; no, I am sure it was not ; I am not yet so curst as to believe it was : — and yet should I have judged so favourably of any other woman ?"

During this time the earl was walking towards home ; but when he caught sight of  
of

of his own house, he started as if he had seen a basilisk, and directed his steps towards Sophia Clermont's.

Catherine meanwhile was vainly expecting her lord's return; and as she hoped that he would have come home before he went any where else, after his first absence from her of three whole days, she concluded that he was not returned: but this conclusion was, she found, only too soon wholly erroneous, when she received the following note from the duchess of C—.

“ Finding your lord is returned, as the duke saw him at Miss Clermont's door to-day, I beg you both to dine here at five, and accompany the duke and me to a private box at Covent Garden.

“ AMELIA C——.”

A mist came over Catherine's eyes as soon as she read this note; and though she was incapable of feeling jealousy, she

she owned in the bitterness of her heart that she had never known poignant anguish till that overwhelming moment ! But even here, her habitual piety soon came to her aid ; and feeling that in proportion to her misery ought to be her resignation, if her faith were really such as she had endeavoured to make it, she sought for support under her sufferings where alone it could be obtained ; and “ Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done ! ” burst from her quivering lips, and calmed her perturbed soul. But how should she answer the note of the duchess ? And after much perplexity she wrote as follows :

“ I shall leave Lord Shirley to answer for himself, my dear duchess ; but I am not at all fit to go to the play this evening, and must decline the pleasure of accompanying you.”

Lord Shirley, however, did not return  
to



to be told of the invitation to the play ; and Catherine's wretchedness increased every hour. Unfortunately too the general called, and asked her how the earl was after his hurried journey.

" I have not seen him yet," replied Catherine.

" Not seen him ! Has he not been home ?"

" No."

" Not home ! when the duke of C—— told me that he saw him at Sophia Clermont's door !"

The general said no more, for he saw Catherine turn pale ; and he well knew that, whatever she felt, this was a subject which her strong sense of a wife's duty would forbid her to talk upon : but to remain with her and see her suffering without expressing his sympathy with her sufferings, he felt to be impossible : therefore, affectionately pressing her cold hand, he  
said,



said, " Good day to you, my dear child!" and hastily left the room.

The general had for some time past been jealous of the earl's visits to Sophia Clermont; and now his fears being confirmed in a most painful degree, he went home with his mind violently irritated against Lord Shirley, and his open neglect, as he thought, of even common decorum. It was therefore with no very complacent feelings that he heard, after he had been home a short time, Lord Shirley himself announced. But there was a look of such misery in the earl's countenance, that it instantly softened the general's heart in his favour; and extending his hand to him, he said, " For mercy's sake, Lionel, tell me what has happened to you." Lord Shirley wrung the hand he offered in silence, and burst into tears; while the general anxiously and impatiently awaited his communications.

Lord

Lord Shirley had returned again to Sophia Clermont's door, but had not resolution to go in and impart to her such strong evidence against the fame if not the virtue of his wife, especially as he knew that she would by manner, if not by words, insinuate that she thought her guilty to the fullest extent. "No," thought he, "I will not put her, fallen as she is, in the power of an envious woman; but, as my mind will be upset if I have no confidant and adviser, I will go and state every circumstance to one to whom her honour and reputation are as dear as to myself:" and he instantly went in search of the general. But when he had recovered his agitation at first seeing him, he was wholly at a loss for words to begin his narration: and the general said impatiently, "Well, it is lucky for me that I have only this moment parted with Catherine, else your emotion would alarm me

me still more than it does ; for I should think it concerned her."

" And so it does concern her :—she is the cause, the sole cause, of the misery you behold."

" By being your wife, my lord ?" asked the general sternly, " and thereby preventing your marrying another ? for I know not else how Catherine Shirley should make the misery of her husband."

" I don't understand you," replied the earl indignantly : " if Lady Shirley be as irreproachable a wife as I have been a husband, my misery will soon be at an end."

" If she be an irreproachable wife !"

" Yes, I did say so ; and I beg to be allowed to relate to you some circumstances which warrant the expression."

" Oh, pray relate them," answered the general with a sneer ; " they must be convincing, no doubt."

The

The earl immediately, but with great hesitation and confusion, confessed his long jealousy of Melvyn, and the indiscreet, indecorous, if not criminal conduct by which Catherine had increased his suspicions till they amounted *almost* to certainty."

The general listened with motionless astonishment and indignation.—At length he exclaimed, "This must be a base conspiracy against your wife, my lord, founded on her want of knowledge of the world, and on that rash innocence which, conscious of its own incorruptability, disregards appearances. These people are vile agents of viler employers; an artful man and a disappointed woman—My lord, my lord, I tremble, I shudder to think that you must be either their dupe or their assistant in this bad business."

"Assistant!" cried the earl, starting up, every fibre trembling with indignant

nant passion : “ You cannot, General Shirley, nay you dare not believe it ! ”

“ My lord, you dare believe and even tell me you think my grand-daughter an adulteress, a fact full as improbable as that her husband should be leagued with a male and female profligate to take away her reputation.”

“ Sir,” replied the earl, “ I came to you for consolation and comfort. But—”

“ And, my lord, if my suspicions really wrong you, you have found both ; for I have told you these appearances against Lady Shirley, which are I own extremely strong, are nothing more than the result of a base conspiracy against her fame and peace.”

“ But why should the persons in question conspire against her ? ”

“ Why are persons ever vicious, my lord ?—But I see, sir, that you wish, spite

of what you say, and no doubt from private motives of your own, to believe what you have heard : and as that is the case, I will not stay in your presence longer than to assure you that I shall at any time be willing to receive Lady Shirley to my arms and my protection, whenever her husband thinks proper to abandon her." Then rushing into another room he left Lord Shirley offended but relieved :—for the general might be right—Melvyn and Sophia might be actuated by motives of revenge ;—but yet it was impossible, for Melvyn must know that he risked his life : and though it might be worth a lover's while to risk life for the possession of the woman he loved, yet surely it could not be for the mere appearance of having obtained it. Still the love, the devoted love, he bore to Catherine, made him resolve to give the general's

ral's opinion all the weight possible ; and while it predominated over his mind he had resolution to return home.

Catherine was alone when he entered, and so overcome at seeing him, that instead of running to meet him she sunk on a chair beside her, and pale as death awaited his approach.

" Whence," said Lord Shirley to himself, " whence springs this strong emotion? Could any thing less than conscious guilt produce it?" And his manner became as cold as possible. " How are you, Lady Shirley?" said he, just touching her cheek with his lips.

" How *am* I?" she returned: " O Shirley! how can I be otherwise than miserable?"

" If miserable, you have no one to blame but yourself.—Does not your conscience accuse you of much that even the

D 2

most



most indulgent husband must think deserving reprobation ?”

“ It does ; but not enough to excuse your past and present coldness ;—not enough to justify your going to the house of another before you came home to see me.”

Lord Shirley could not listen to that touching and now mournful voice, without feeling his heart insensibly attracted towards her, and his suspicions diminished ; and to conceal the extent of his emotion he turned into the inner drawing-room.

At this moment Moore, Lady Shirley's maid, opened the door of the front room, and said, “ My lady, Mr. Melvyn has sent for the bonnet and shawl he borrowed for you last night.”

“ What !—what is that ?” cried the earl coming forward.

“ Only—my lord,—a bonnet and shawl  
that



that—" said Moore, frightened at her lord and for her lady.

" I will explain," said Catherine in a faint voice ; and trembling with emotion from the probable result of what she was forced thus abruptly to communicate, " I was forced to walk from the Opera last night, and with Mr. Melvyn, and he was so good as to borrow for me—"

Lord Shirley waited to hear no more ; but darting at her a look fierce and terrible with reproach and indignation, he ran down stairs and locked himself into his study to consider what was to be done. But his own gentleman knocked loudly for admittance, telling him that he had a note to deliver from Lord M—— which required an immediate answer ; and Lord Shirley reluctantly admitted him.

" My dear Lord, (wrote Lord M——)  
I con-

I conjure you to come to my house on the receipt of this—I have only now ascertained the fact of your being returned. It is necessary for *your own sake* that you and I should have some serious conversation on a matter that most nearly and dearly concerns you and all most dear to you.

“Your sincere and faithful friend,

“M——.”

“This must concern my wife!” thought Lord Shirley; and for a moment he dreaded hearing any thing to confirm his wretchedness beyond doubt; but the next minute he thought certainty better than suspense, and reached Lord M——’s house even sooner than the messenger did. He found Lord M—— alone, and saw that he felt some strong emotion at seeing him; while the former discovered from the hurry and agitation

agitation depicted on Lord Shirley's countenance, that what he had to communicate was probably not unexpected by him.

Lord M—— was a man of strong sense and strong prejudices, and he thought it wrong in a woman to be remarkable for any thing, beauty excepted ; but the reputation of extraordinary virtue or piety was to him almost as offensive as of extraordinary talents or extraordinary impudence. Nay, to dare to be extraordinary in any thing, was being impudent in his eyes ; and what he considered as the assumption of superior sanctity in Lady Shirley had greatly prejudiced his mind against her. Your true *system-monger* is rarely deeply hurt at any thing that proves the truth of his theory : and spite of his regard for Lord Shirley, spite of the real kindness of his nature, he had  
contem-

contemplated with a little self-complacency the saintly Lady Shirley coming out of a house of bad repute.

But this was an unworthy tribute, exacted of his better feelings by his self-love; and every sensation, but of pity for his sufferings past present and to come, was annihilated in the heart of Lord M—— when the earl entered his apartment. “Shirley,” said Lord M—— squeezing his hand affectionately, “I loved your father dearly, and I love his son; love him for his father’s sake and his own too.”

“My dear lord, I never doubted your regard.”

“Nor did I send for you now to assure you of it. But as I think that nothing but strong regard and strong intimacy can justify the liberty I am going to take——”

“Oh! no apologies, but come to the point

point at once." And as he spoke, Lord Shirley held his hand to his head, which literally throbbed with the agony of expectation.

"Well then, Shirley:—I was abroad when you married; and I returned to hear at first only of your happiness, and the virtue, nay piety, of your countess."

"*At first!*—I understand you; go on."

"But lately,—tell me, my dear friend,—have you ever had cause to suspect Lady Shirley's affections were alienated from you?"

"I have."

"But not that a loss of virtue had been the consequence?"

"What makes you ask?" answered Lord Shirley, turning pale as death.

"If you wish it, you shall hear."

"Go on; I am prepared now for any thing."

But he deceived himself ; for when Lord M—— entered into the whole minute detail of what he had himself seen in addition to what Sir Harry Turton had witnessed, the wretched husband leaned his head on the table in a degree of misery, of certain, of hopeless misery, to which all his preceding agonies had been nothing in comparison. When he was more composed he desired to see Sir Harry Turton, who was waiting below stairs ; and he immediately obeyed the summons.

Lord Shirley listened with tolerable patience to the recital Sir Harry gave, till he mentioned the bonnet and shawl which Melvyn had borrowed ; and then he started up, saying “ The rascal sent for these very things just now when I was with her ; and she told me that he had borrowed them for her to walk home with from the Opera ! ”

“ Of

“Of the fact as far as appearances go, my dear lord, there wanted no confirmation : all that remains unproved is the criminality of the parties ; and—”

“Surely,” cried Sir Harry, “Melvyn’s sending openly for the things he borrowed was very impudent ; and Lady Shirley’s owning that she had walked home with him, was very impudent also, if they were both conscious of great guilt.”

“I was thinking the same,” said Lord Shirley faintly. “But then the house—you are sure it was a bad house?”

“Quite sure,” replied Sir Harry.

“But did he not decoy her into it, think ye, on some false pretence?”

“Is it likely?” replied Lord M——.

“Melvyn’s character has hitherto been unblemished!—My dear lord,” he continued, “though I love Sir Harry’s candour, and  
pity

pity your desperate wish of trusting to it, I must say that Lady Shirley remained in the house some time; and when she came out she leaned very contentedly on Melvyn, and they evidently parted on good terms."

"Is there then no hope, no doubt?" cried Lord Shirley, throwing himself on the sofa in such a paroxysm of misery as nearly threatened to overturn his reason; while Lord M—— looked on in silent and powerless sympathy, and Sir Harry cried like a child.

"Come, tell me! what is to be done?" cried Lord Shirley, at length starting up. "Shall we go to the general? I trust he will be convinced now!—But no, my first business is with Melvyn. Lord M——, go to him, you know what to say; you will be my second?"

"No



“No doubt ; but Sir Harry had better go with me, should he ask on what grounds of suspicion you proceed.”

“Undoubtedly.” And the two gentlemen departed, leaving Lord Shirley to ‘meditation e’en to madness.’

Melvyn was at home expecting to receive some message from Lord Shirley ; and thinking that Lord M—— or Sir Harry Turton would be the bearer of it, his plan of action was already laid. As soon as the gentlemen appeared, he courteously demanded to what fortunate circumstance he owed the honour of a visit from Lord M——. And when Lord M—— said that he waited on him from Lord Shirley, he affected to look confused and to act astonishment. But when Lord M—— explained his business, he acted indignation, and desired to know what ground Lord Shirley had for such  
unwar-

unwarrantable insinuations. But when Lord M—— and Sir Harry both declared what they had seen, and what Lord M—— thought it his duty to communicate to the injured husband, he affected to be excessively overcome; and falling back in his chair and covering his face with his hands, he murmured out “Dear creature! how will she support this trial!” And for some moments he was silent.

“We cannot stay here, sir,” said Lord M—— haughtily, “to witness your regrets for the disclosure of a crime which one grain of principle would have prevented you from committing. But I desire to know what I am to tell Lord Shirley.”

“This, my lord;—that I cannot, will not add to my guilt, by lifting my hand against the life of Lord Shirley. No, my lord,

lord, I have injured him too much already ; and no consideration will force me to give him the meeting he desires.”

“ Is this your last resolve, Mr. Melvyn ? and will you, on this paltry pretence, dare to deny Lord Shirley the only satisfaction he can receive ? for the grounds are not, I fear, sufficient for a divorce.”

“ My lord, whatever be the motives to which you and the world may impute my refusal to fight Lord Shirley, I shall still persevere in it. I will not run the risk of murdering the man I have dishonoured.”

“ This sounds prettily, sir,” said Lord M—— ; “ and we will report what you say faithfully to Lord Shirley.”

They did so ; and worked his noble and indignant mind up to a state of phrensy by the narration.

“ And

“ And does he *own* the fact,” exclaimed Lord Shirley, “ as if he *gloried* in it? And does he make a merit of letting me live after having dishonoured me? But he shall fight me still, if he has one atom of spirit.” So saying, he rushed down stairs, Lord M—— and Sir Harry following him as fast as they could, and went to Melvyn’s house.

## CHAPTER III.

Few persons were so well read as this man in the human heart, and the natural course of human motives and human actions. He foresaw the chance there was of a visit from Lord Shirley, and he had prepared for it. Lord Shirley knocked at the door violently; and as soon as it opened he asked whether Mr. Melvyn was within. The servant said "Yes." On which the earl rushed past him, before Lord M—— and Sir Harry Turton had entered the hall. Lord Shirley found Melvyn, though it was near the end of a hot June, sitting by a fire; but that fire had evidently been only just lighted for the sake of burning papers; and this Melvyn  
was

was in the act of doing as Lord Shirley entered the room.

On seeing him, Melvyn attempted to seize a note that lay at a little distance : but Lord Shirley recognising Catherine's hand, tore it from his grasp, and read the following words:—

“ All will soon be discovered, I fear : but be on your guard : I mean to assert my innocence to the last. The bonnet and shawl were a sad mistake. In haste ; but wholly yours.

“ C. S——.”

It seemed as if every fresh proof of Catherine's guilt had been preceded in Lord Shirley's mind by some fresh conviction of her innocence, with such unabated acuteness of suffering did he appear to receive each different successive evidence of the truth of his suspicions.

“ Sir,”

“ Sir,” said he at length, “ I came to *insist* on your meeting me.”

“ I will not.”

“ Base dishonourable seducer !”

“ I am not a seducer, my lord,” interrupted Melvyn. “ I should not have dared to think of Lady Shirley improperly, had I not been privy by accident to the secret of the man on the balcony.”

“ *Coward !*” At this word Melvyn looked fierce.

“ Yes, coward ! And even your wretched victim will despise you as I do !”

“ My lord, I cannot bear this, and I will meet you,” replied Melvyn. “ I am no coward ; but I have injured you so much already— !”

Here he stopped, and turned very pale, retreating some paces : for Lord Shirley, irritated to fury, advanced as if about to strike him with his muscular and powerful  
ful

ful arm. But Lord M—— withheld him.

“Wretch! name your time and place,” vociferated Lord Shirley.

“Six o’clock this evening, behind Chalk-Farm.”

“Agreed.” And his companions bore the agitated earl away between them; and calling a coach, conveyed him in a most terrible state of mind back to Lord M——’s house.

“Have you any worldly affairs to settle, Shirley?” said Lord M——.

“None. My will has been made ever since the birth of my children; and I will not alter it, though it was made in order to show my boundless love and confidence in ——. Yet I must alter it in one respect. I cannot leave my children to the care of an unprincipled mother, you know; that part of it I must alter: and I shall leave them, dear Lord

M——,



M——, to your guardianship. Give me pen and paper immediately.”

Accordingly he wrote the addition or codicil he wished ; and having had it signed by proper witnesses, he declared that he had nothing more to do. “ You will find,” said he, “ if I fall, how magnificently I have provided for her who has destroyed me. And I think she will learn to feel that I deserved a kinder return. And Oh ! God grant that the feeling may lead her to timely remorse and penitence ! Tell, Lord M——,—tell her what I now say to you : and also tell her, that I forgive—no, no—not yet, not yet—I fear I cannot forgive her yet.”

At length it was time to set off for Chalk-Farm ; and Sir Harry having ordered a surgeon to attend, took his own station near enough to be on the spot as soon as all was over, while the two lords  
proceeded

proceeded to the place of rendezvous. They found Melvyn with a friend of his already there : and Lord M—— lost no time in measuring the ground. “ Mr. Melvyn,” said he, “ as Lord Shirley is the challenger, you fire first.” Melvyn took his ground, and the pistol offered him ; but instantly discharged it in the air. “ Now, my lord, I am ready to receive your fire,” said he ; “ but I swear that I will not take aim at you.”

“ Nay, this is trifling,” cried Lord M—— ; while Lord Shirley vainly endeavoured to speak.

“ Trifling or not, it is my last and solemn resolve,” he replied. And Lord Shirley with great effort exclaiming “ I cannot be your butcher,” threw down his pistol, and rushed with phrensied speed from the scene of action. Sir Harry saw him coming, and took his unresisting arm ;

arm; but he forbore to question him: and Lord M——, who soon overtook them, told him what had passed.

“This conduct of his will make his peace with some,” said Lord M——; “but as he has never given any proof of courage, I suspect that cowardice, and not compunction, is the cause of his acting thus; and I could almost find in my heart to affront him myself, in order to see whether I am right or not.”

It was some time before any thing could draw Lord Shirley from the deep and gloomy abstraction into which he had fallen. At last, however, Lord M——, alarmed at the state he was in, asked him what he meant to do with Lady Shirley; and whether it was not right that she should be informed directly of what had happened. At mention of Catherine, Lord Shirley started, and burst into a  
violent

violent agony of tears ; which, by relieving him, also relieved the apprehensions of Lord M——. But the next moment he suddenly started up, and declared that his wife was innocent, and that the whole was a base conspiracy against her fame ; and that he would hasten to her immediately and implore her forgiveness for having dared to suspect her ; declaring that, such had always been the purity and piety of her life, it was easier to believe the whole world leagued against her, than that such a being could ever fall from virtue.

“ Well, then, my lord,” coldly and almost sneeringly replied Lord M—— ; “ then take Lady Shirley to your heart again. If you can only *think* her innocent, she is so to you at least. And if you are but happy, no matter that the world considers you in the light of a complaisant and contented husband.—

‘ You’ll

‘You’ll find not Cassio’s kisses on her lips.’ ”

“Distraction!” cried Lord Shirley, starting in agony from his seat. “But remember, Lord M——,” he indignantly added, “that Othello found at last that Desdemona was innocent, and the victim of a base conspiracy.—Men have been villains, my lord.”

“True, and women unchaste.”

“But not such women as my wife, Lord M——. No, it is impossible that a creature so self-governed, so modest, so pious, should thus suddenly without provocation have plunged into such depravity! I cannot believe it: every action of her life gives the lie to such a possibility.”

“Then I conclude,” coolly answered Lord M——, “that no mystery, or secret, ever attached to the conduct of Lady Shirley?”

Lord Shirley started ; and replied in a faltering accent, “ Yes, both—both, my lord :—there always was a mystery, and a secret.”

“ Aye, and a man, a handsome young man in the balcony.”

“ True, true ;” *and elsewhere*, he was about to add : but he recollected that the suspicious circumstance which happened at his country-seat was known to no one but himself ; and a mixture of tenderness towards Catherine, of shame, and of wretchedness, prevented his disclosure of it. But the recollection of it now operated powerfully against his rising conviction of his wife’s innocence, and Lord M—— continued thus :

“ Then, pray tell me, Lord Shirley, how you can reconcile these circumstances with the pure and upright and ingenious

ous

ous line of conduct which always distinguished Lady Shirley?"

"Lady Shirley assured me that she was bound by a solemn oath not to explain the suspicious circumstances which alarmed me; but that she was trying to obtain absolution from her oath, and that then I should know all; adding, that in the meanwhile I knew that no consideration had power enough to make her break a vow pledged to her God."

"Exemplary piety!" replied Lord M—— sneeringly. "And you were its easy dupe! So this pious lady was in the habit of making vows, was she? under the sanction of which she allowed herself to be so mysterious and secret as to injure her own fame, and destroy her husband's peace!—And she must not, forsooth, undergo the common fate of other women, and be suspected of common frailty, al-  
E 2 .                    though



though she involves herself in suspicious circumstances, merely because she is a professor of uncommon piety!—And she who is thus wantonly calling on the name of God, cannot, to be sure, be believed capable of error with man? My lord, my lord, of all sinners, the most odious to me is a religious sinner.”

“And to me too,” replied Lord Shirley. “And could I really believe Lady Shirley guilty, she would be to me the worst of sinners, one sinning under the garb of sanctity. But will you not allow that much stress is always to be laid on weight of character?”

“Much; particularly where the accused person is a simple natural character, and does not affect to be over-righteous. But let me ask you, whether you ever knew a woman accused of improper conduct, without her having by some imprudence



prudence deserved it? Can you say, even were Lady Shirley innocent of the great crime laid to her charge, that she had not deserved to be suspected by her imprudence?"

"My lord," replied Lord Shirley, hastily rising, "I cannot argue, I can only feel, and my feelings are most wretched."

At length, after running the melancholy round of his thoughts; after calling to mind the general grounds on which he could acquit, and the particular details on which he must convict Catherine; after listening, too, in perturbed silence, to Lord M——'s alternate arguments and cutting sarcasms; Lord Shirley, with a convinced head but a doubting heart, desired Lord M—— to advise him how to act, and to tell him how he had best make known to Lady Shirley that they were separated for ever.

"Now,

“ Now, my lord, you act like a man, and we will consult together on what is best to be done.” Lord Shirley then, after a severe struggle with himself, said that he wished them to wait on the general, and tell him that Lord Shirley requested him to take Lady Shirley to his house, and inform her that she and her lord could never meet again,—though for want of legal proof he could not attempt to procure a divorce.

The gentlemen did as they were desired ; and, to the consternation and astonishment of the general, declared to him every particular.

“ Gentlemen,” cried the general after a few minutes silence, “ I have never wished for lengthened life till this moment ; and now I heartily desire it, that I may live to see vengeance overtake the diabolical authors of this base conspiracy against the  
honour

honour and fame of the most perfect of her sex; a being as innocent as she is unfortunate!—By Heaven! she is another Desdemona!" he added, bursting into tears: "but I will take care that she shall not die like her, though she must suffer like her."

"And is it possible, general," asked Lord M——, "that you can still think Lady Shirley injured?"

"Aye, my lord; for it is much more easy for me to fancy Melvyn a deep designing, though undetected unsuspected villain, than for me to believe that a woman of the most regular, virtuous, and pious habits—one, too, who loved her husband almost to enthusiasm, could all at once become not only an adulteress, but a hardened bare-faced sinner, and accompany her betrayer to the very temple of vice. Do not suppose that I shall be satisfied without inquiring much further into this business:—and when I have conducted Lady Shirley  
hither,

hither, I shall beg leave to see you here, gentlemen, that you may hear her story. At present you must excuse me, for it is my duty to hasten to my injured child directly." And on this they withdrew; and the general ordered his carriage, which in a few minutes conveyed him to Grosvenor Square.

## CHAPTER IV.

CATHERINE meanwhile was a prey to the most violent apprehensions relative to the safety of her lord : and much as he abhorred duelling, she was afraid that he had gone out, maddened by jealousy, in search of Melvyn. But had this been the case, she thought that some tidings of the event must ere then have reached her ; and it was now past the hour of dinner, and yet Lord Shirley was not returned. Wretched, perplexed, yet still supported by that firm reliance on Providence which never deserted her, she had dismissed her unconscious children to the nursery, and had resumed her station at the window, to watch for the coming of that being who had, she feared, been only too dear to her,—when she saw the gene-

ral drive up to her door in his carriage ; and as he usually came on foot, she instantly apprehended that he was sent to announce to her some terrible intelligence.

The general slowly ascended the stairs, meaning to affect the calmness which he did not feel : but the moment he beheld the woe-worn but innocent face of Catherine, all his assumed fortitude forsook him, and catching her to his bosom he wept over her the tears of agonized affection.

“ I see,” said Catherine, “ I have something terrible to learn ; but believe me, that the hours of dreadful suspense which I have undergone, have also been hours of preparation ; and I trust that I shall be able to endure whatever trials are assigned me.”

“ Trials indeed ! my child,” said the general ;

general ; then added in a firmer voice, “ Lady Shirley, this is no longer a home for you ; and I am come to take you to my house.”

“ Ha ! ” exclaimed Catherine, catching his arm wildly. “ Is it indeed so ?—Am I deserted ? ”

“ Deserted ! Yes—and you have lost your husband’s esteem and confidence, and your reputation ! ”

“ But as I am so entirely innocent, I cannot lose them.”

“ No ! poor deluded victim !—Know then, that though I believe you spotless as an angel, your husband looks upon you as a vile adulteress, and rejects you from his home and his heart ! ”

“ Impossible ! Appearances may be against me, but they must disappear before the light of truth.”

“ But when ? ”

“ Oh !



“ Oh ! let Mr. Melvyn and myself be instantly confronted with our accusers ! Let them hear our honest explanation of every suspicious circumstance ! ”

“ My dearest child, this Melvyn, to whom you would appeal, himself confirms the truth of the whole accusation, and has owned to Lord Shirley that he has really dishonoured him ! ”

“ Is it possible that there exists such a villain ? ” exclaimed the wretched Catherine. “ Yet, merciful in thy inflictions, gracious Being ! ” she added, lifting her tearless eyes to heaven, “ thou hast made me derive comfort from the conviction that my beloved husband has been misled by artifice the most specious and highly-wrought.—Oh ! believe me,” she added, “ my mind is much relieved ; for, clever as this vile man is, it is impossible that he can be always on his guard ; and I think, when  
he



he is confronted with me, that he and his accomplices will find even their falsehood and cunning no match for truth and innocence like mine !”

“ Well ; far be it from me,” said the general, “ to destroy the hope that supports thee, darling.—But come, let us hasten from this accursed house.”

“ Accursed ! O fie ! No, I shall bless it ever !—But I may take my children with me, no doubt ?”

“ I shall certainly,” said the general, “ not wait for leave to take them.” And ringing the bell, he desired that the children might be brought down, and that the nurses with their clothes should follow to his house.

The fortitude of Catherine, great as it was, sunk under the trial of quitting her house as a condemned adulteress ; and it was with great difficulty that she could conceal her anguish from the curious and  
anxious

anxious eyes of the servants who were waiting in the hall.

When Catherine reached New Street, she was in such a state of weakness and dejection that she was forced to go to bed directly, spite of the extreme wish she felt to write a letter to her husband, desiring to be heard before she was judged and punished : and it was with great reluctance she admitted that such a task it was as yet beyond her powers to achieve. But though calumniated, driven from her home, discarded by her husband, and no doubt about to be an outcast from the world ; supported by the consciousness of innocence, and secure in the protection of that Being in whom she trusted, the slumbers of Catherine even on that distressing night were soft, unbroken, and refreshing, like those of the innocent babes who slept beside her ; and she arose in the morning calm and resigned, though  
tenderly

tenderly alive to the consciousness that she was probably for ever parted from the husband whom she yet fervently loved.

Her first care when she awoke was to write to the earl. And had he been allowed to read what she wrote, it is probable that he might have been induced to believe the possibility of a conspiracy existing against her. But Catherine's hand-writing threw him into such an agitation, that Lord M——, who had not the least doubt of her guilt, and thought that reading her letter would only needlessly distress the earl, advised its being returned unread. And the anguish which this unexpected severity inflicted on Catherine, destroyed at once the composure to which a night of rest had restored her. She then insisted on seeing Lord M—— and Sir Harry Turton ; and they obeyed the summons.

Contrary to the expectations of both,  
and

and to the wish of one, Catherine received them with such an open steadfast eye, such a calm dignity of carriage, and such a lofty unembarrassed mien, that, spite of their prepossessions, a conviction of her unsullied purity, momentarily at least, forced itself upon their minds; and Lord M—— was obliged to remember that the arm of dazzling beauty, which now confined her floating drapery, when he last saw it leaned upon the shoulder of the man who issued with her from the abode of guilt.

They had not been seated long before the general, in Catherine's name, demanded of the baronet first, and then of the peer, the same detail again which they had given him the day before. But when, in addition to that, Lord M—— produced the note which Lord Shirley had declared to be Catherine's hand-writing, this new  
proof

proof how far human depravity could go in order to effect the destruction of an unoffending fellow-creature, filled her with horror and consternation.

“ See,” said she to the general, “ how like to my hand-writing ! I could almost have sworn to it myself ! ”

“ I see no resemblance at all, child,” said the general pettishly ; “ and those only who wish to see a resemblance,—your own noble, generous, candid self excepted,—could ever have seen any for a moment.”

“ Well, my lord,” said Catherine smiling, “ as you are prepared by this note for my obstinate assertion of my innocence to the last moment, I feel that I may assert for ever, and you will disbelieve me for ever. Yet still I think it my duty to assert, and I call on God to witness the assertion, that the new-born babe is not  
more

more innocent than I am, in thought, word, or deed, against the honour of my beloved husband! and that it is my firm conviction, that although for wise purposes the guilty are permitted at present to triumph over the innocent, in due time they will reap the reward of their wickedness, and the purity they have blasted will be made manifest to the world. I probably shall not live to see that day, because I feel (laying her hand to her heart), I feel here that the decisive blow is struck: but my children will live to see their mother's fame cleared, and to avenge me of my enemies by pitying and forgiving them!"

Sir Harry was visibly affected by this address; but Lord M——, still operated upon by his system, coldly added, that even her asseverations would weigh nothing against facts; and he concluded that her

her ladyship would not attempt to disprove the evidence brought against her.

“ I can’t deny that I walked from the Opera with Mr. Melvyn ; that, because it rained, he borrowed for me a hat and shawl ; that in a street, the name of which is unknown to me, I became so ill that he pressed me to take shelter and sit down for a few minutes in the house of a friend of his : but as he said this, I heard no more distinctly, as I was seized with giddiness and a singing in my ears ; and when I recovered my recollection I found myself in a neat room, and attended by Mr. Melvyn and a young man, who was holding a glass of water to my mouth ; and in about half an hour after, Mr. Melvyn left me, to go and seek for a coach.—Now you tell me this house was a vile one ; but I beseech you let this young man be called upon, and let him be confronted with me ! ”

“ This



“This request shall be complied with,” said the general.

“It ought to be,” said Sir Harry; “and I will undertake to bring the man hither.”

He then departed on his task; and even Lord M—— owned that this step was a very proper one.

Sir Harry returned with the person in question, even sooner than was expected. But much as he evidently wished to have Lady Shirley proved innocent, it was clear when he appeared that nothing satisfactory had transpired. That was indeed impossible, as the waiter was an old tool of Melvyn's, and he was prepared what to answer. Still, when Catherine fixed her dark eyes on him, as if she would read his soul, he shrunk from her earnest gaze, and evidently changed colour.

“Yes,



“Yes, yes—’tis he, it is the very same man I saw in that house,” said Catherine. “And now I conjure you, sir, to answer me, as you shall answer at the dread day of judgement, whether, when you saw me in the house you belonged to, you took me for an abandoned woman?”

“What else could I take you for, my lady?—No others come there.”

Catherine started at these words, as they convinced her that she only saw a being prepared to witness against her; and darting at him a look of indignant reproach, she ceased to pursue her hopeless interrogatories.

“Why do you not go on with your questions?” said Lord M——.

“Because I see that this man is bribed to witness against me.”

“Bribed! my lady—I scorn your words.”

“Aye,

“Aye, well you may; for you know that I am powerless against you. But what have I more to ask? Nothing: for, even if this person had been with us all the time we staid in the house, he could say that he was not.”

“And was he not with you all the time?” asked the general.

“No, sir,” hastily interrupted the man; “I left them when my lady recovered, and certainly I saw no more of them till the coach came and Mr. Melvyn handed madam out.”

“Enough: you may go,” cried Catherine. And when the man was gone, she mournfully added, “Did you, my dear grandfather, conceive that such a system of wickedness as has been practised against me, could ever have been devised against any one? However, it is a comfort to me to think, as I before said, that to no  
common

common arts my dear deluded lord and myself have fallen victims."

"Lady Shirley," said Lord M——, "I must, though most unwillingly, declare, that it is easier to believe you capable of a common fault, such as adultery is, than to believe a man so unnaturally, so uncommonly wicked, as Mr. Melvyn must be, if he has not only laid such a train of appearances for your destruction, but has himself declared that he had been your seducer. But no, that he denies, and says that he should not have ventured to think of you improperly, if he had not been privy to your intimacy with the man in the balcony, I think he called him."

"Villain!" exclaimed the general. "What could he mean by that, my child?"

"Oh! believe me, he has a meaning in every thing; and I now see how long back he laid a plan for my destruction.—

Well,

Well, I am now convinced that my fate is inevitable :—and I have nothing to do, but humbly to kiss the rod,” she added in the tone of deep sorrow; and with the quiet of despair, “I could have wished to have seen my lord once more; yet, knowing that it would be for the last time, perhaps such a parting I am spared in mercy. But Oh! to think that I shall never now see for days, for weeks, for months, for years, the being from whom I could scarcely bear to be separated for hours!—But he was indeed become too dear to me, and I am weaned from him in time, that I may prepare myself for eternity.”

Lord M——’s heart always became steeled against Lady Shirley whenever she spoke devoutly; because, not being a religious man himself, he candidly and liberally believed all those who professed religion to be either mad or hypocritical; and

and therefore he thought all Lady Shirley's pious language nothing but nauseous cant:—he consequently felt himself nerved by her last words to inflict the blow which he was by Lord Shirley desired to give; and he addressed her as follows:

“Lady Shirley, sorry am I to tell you that I have to execute a most painful commission. I am desired by my unhappy friend, Lord Shirley, to take away your children from you! And—” he could add no more, for Catherine uttering a frantic scream ran to the sofa on which lay her twin children in unconscious slumbers; and throwing her arms round them, she exclaimed, “Monster! you shall have my life first!”

The noise she made awoke the sleeping infants, who, clinging round their mother's neck, called forth the tears that had hitherto refused to flow; and as they plentifully streamed from her eyes, her

phrensy gradually subsided, and her spirit regained its mildness and its pious resignation. “ And is it indeed so ? and must I part with all the dearest ties of life ? Oh ! this is indeed a trial ! Has then my lord *no* pity ?—none ? ”

“ He thinks you have deserved none : but he does still show some compassion ; for though I believe my evidence and that of Sir Harry would be sufficient to entitle him to a divorce, yet from consideration for you and for the family to which you belong, he will not bring your name into a court of justice, nor brand the mother of his children with unnecessary disgrace ; but, if it be practicable, the tale of your guilt shall be known to as few as possible.”

“ Lord M——” said the general, rising indignantly, “ you are Lord Shirley’s friend, and you come hither authorized by him to address his wife on a subject of importance, and you have done

so—

so—and there your commission ends : I must beg, therefore, that you will as soon as may be execute the rest of your commission, cruel and barbarous as it is, that I may no longer have my eyes shocked with the sight of men who look upon that suffering angel as a vile abandoned woman.”

“ I am as impatient to be gone, sir, as you are that I should go,” returned Lord M—— coldly, overlooking the general’s rudeness in his grief.

“ Oh ! stop one moment !” cried Catherine : “ surely I shall be allowed sometimes to see them, even though they are not to know I am their mother !”

“ I have no authority, madam, to say any thing on this subject : but I will say any thing you wish to the earl.”

Catherine now pressed both her children to her bosom ; then after a paroxysm of such anguish as none but a mother can



conceive, she exclaimed “ Yes! Searcher and trier of hearts! even *these, these* dear ones, as it is thy will, I can resign! —and now, thy will be done!”

Then, with a sort of supernatural energy, having previously rung for the nurses, she gave the children into their arms, pressed their glowing cheeks for the last time, and rushed into the next room; but in such evident perturbation that the general followed her, and found her lying on the floor in a state of happy insensibility, as it prevented her from hearing the carriage drive away that bore her infants from her arms for ever.

The next day, when Catherine, who was not well enough to rise, called the general to her bedside, he told her that he begged her to consider him henceforth as wholly devoted to her will, and that he would go with her wherever she chose. And for a few months at least, during  
which



which time she feared Lord Shirley would not let her see her children, she wished to change the scene and to leave England. But to the continent they could not go.

“ But you have a castle in Ireland?

“ I have.—But it is a wild, desolate, bleak spot.”

“ No matter : I am not happy enough yet to be capable of being affected by the external world : there I shall be at least far removed from those who, while I am near them, I shall always be wishing to see ; and there also I shall not be exposed to meet any one of my former acquaintance, who will think it necessary to disclaim all knowledge of the disgraced Lady Shirley.”

The general heaved a deep sigh at the idea of this degradation, and felt as if he wished to challenge the world for her dear sake. But he felt that her scheme of retirement was a wise one, and he consented

to

to set off as soon as she was able to travel.

“That will be to-morrow, I do not doubt,” said Catherine; “and I feel a most nervous impatience to be gone!”

This impatience communicated itself to the general; and in three days at furthest they were on the road to Wales in their way to Ireland. But before he went, the general spared neither time nor money in procuring agents of different descriptions to endeavour to find out the under conspirators against Catherine’s fame, and try by bribery to defeat the effect of bribery.

But great as were Lady Shirley’s sufferings, they were even exceeded by her lord’s. In vain did Lord M—— and his other friends call; they were not admitted;—in vain did Sophia write; her letters remained unanswered: till at length his health yielded to the sufferings of his  
mind,

mind, and Lord Shirley was soon raving in all the delirium of fever. But, luckily for Catherine, she heard neither of his illness nor danger till he was entirely restored to health. During the intervals of his delirium he thought he saw a female form flitting past his curtains; and sometimes when he seemed to doze, leaning over his pillow: and wild as the idea was, he could not help fancying that this object, if real, could only be his repentant wife, who had prevailed on his attendants thus to allow her to vent her penitence and her tender remorse: and the idea was so soothing to him, spite of his wrongs, that he dared not inquire who it was that he had seen, or whether he had been deceived by the images of a delirious brain, lest he should be forced to abandon it. At length, however, he summoned resolution to ask; and to his great mortification and almost to his disgust, a feeling which the  
lady

lady was far from expecting to excite, he learnt that this anxious and tender visitor was no other than Sophia Clermont.

Had not Lord Shirley's plans been fixed before, this circumstance would have determined him : and the first step he took, when he recovered, was to advertise his house in Grosvenor Square for sale, and to retire instantly to his seat within thirty miles of London, and live there, superintending the education of his children, unseeing and unseen.

This was a stroke which the artful Sophia had not foreseen : for, as much of the tender and heroic nature of her passion for Lord Shirley had subsided, she would now have been glad to offer him, in the tender attentions of a faithful mistress, some consolation for the wound inflicted by a supposed faithless wife. Nor was it robbed of any of its force by the intelligence that the earl had left London without  
even

even bidding her adieu either by mouth or in writing.

“Cold, ungrateful wretch!” she exclaimed. “But it is a comfort to me to know that he is more unhappy himself than his ingratitude makes me.” And she and Melvyn often rejoiced together in the complete vengeance they had both achieved on the insensible beings who had rejected their love, and whose happiness and prosperity had made them objects of their hatred and their envy.

## CHAPTER V.

BUT I must now describe how the tale of Lady Shirley's guilt was received in the circles in which she had so lately moved, the admiration of our sex, and the envy of the other.

Those women to whom the modest propriety of her dress and manner and the correctness of her conduct had been a tacit reproach, gave eager and delighted credence to the tale of her guilt, though they thought Lord M—— and Sir Harry Turton two meddling officious tell-tales : while the men generally declared they knew not what to think ; but that Melvyn was certainly a very happy fellow. Virtue and candour, however, in the shape of the Duchess of C——, refused to believe the whole to be any thing but a base conspiracy against the fame of an  
innocent

innocent woman. And against the argument that, as Melvyn's character as a man of honour was unblemished, he could not be villain enough to have contrived such a diabolical scheme; she set the equally unblemished and much higher character of the accused Lady Shirley; and contended that it was more likely that the wounded pride and disappointed passion of a rejected lover should lead him to take even such far-fetched and difficult revenge, than that a woman of such sound principles and pure conduct should be guilty of the imputed crime.

While, such was the influence of the duchess in every view most creditable to the best interests of women, that she made many converts to her opinion, and the severe and hasty belief of the earl were harshly commented upon;—but by no one more than by Mrs. Delaney, who, now that her great-niece Lady Shirley was no longer



longer an object of jealousy but of pity, entered into her defence with eagerness the most persevering, and declared her to be in her opinion the most injured of women ; while her husband, with whom she was constantly quarrelling, and whose gallantries made her incessantly unhappy, assured her sarcastically that he should think it right to look narrowly after her conduct, lest gallantry should be a family failing.

But while opinions were thus divided respecting the innocence and guilt of the calumniated Catherine, there was one being on whom the conviction of her entire innocence was every day and every hour forcing itself still more and more : and when removed from every influence but that of the recollection of her piety, and her virtue, Lord Shirley became convinced that she had been the victim of woman's jealousy, and of unman-  
ly



ly vengeance. And after she had been gone about six months, he resolved no longer to delay humbling himself before her, imploring her pardon for the weakness of his rash belief, and conjuring her to return to him, and to her children.

Since Catherine had left him, never had Lord Shirley known so easy a moment as that which succeeded his resolution to write to Catherine; and when he had written his letter full of all the eloquence of a contrite heart and a self-reproaching spirit, a weight seemed suddenly removed from his soul, which had before seemed likely to deprive him of reason; and the idea of Catherine's return, and conviction of Catherine's innocence, ultimately engrossed and gratified his imagination.

The evening on which he had written this letter, which was the day six-months of Catherine's leaving England, as Lord Shirley was sitting alone in the middle  
room.

room of the suite I have before described, which had been appropriated to Catherine, the door of the bow-window room behind him was suddenly thrown open, and a tall and almost gigantic figure appeared.—Lord Shirley instantly concluding that it was the man of the balcony, who had visited Catherine in the same manner, instantly arose, and was fiercely approaching him. But taking a brace of horse-pistols from under his coat, the man exclaimed, “Keep your distance, or you are a dead man. And you are also a dead man unless you sit quietly down, while I have some serious talk with you, not once attempting to ring for your servants.”

Lord Shirley immediately saw his danger, and promised quiet obedience to his extraordinary guest. Besides, his curiosity was much excited relative to this man; and he hoped he was now going to hear an explanation of his connexion  
with

with Catherine, while he shuddered at the same time with apprehension lest he should be also going to hear that the being before him was her first love ; in short, the identical Jack Lawson, of whom the youths at Somerset House had declared her to be “ so devilish fond ; ” while he also knew him to be the man whose mysterious intercourse with her, to which accident made him privy, had emboldened Melvyn, as he himself declared, to address her in language of illicit love.

“ Sit down, and I will listen to you,” said Lord Shirley. — “ I have never seen you before, as you now appear ; but it is probable that, if I saw you as you are, I should know you personally.”

“ You shall soon judge of that,” replied the stranger : and pulling off his red wig and mustachios, and the black patch he that night wore over his eye, a face and head of uncommon beauty presented

presented themselves to Lord Shirley's view, and features and a countenance familiar to him."

"Yes, once seen you cannot be forgotten," cried the earl: "and I remember to have seen you at parade in my grenadier troop."

"True, and I am a deserter thence; but these pistols secure me from being taken, though in the presence of my commanding officer."

"They do; and would even if I wished to seize you—and I am sure I do not," he added, sighing deeply.

The stranger heard his sigh, and understood it; and for a while his eyes lost much of their ferocity. At this moment the earl's eyes met his; and starting at the conviction that now burst upon his mind, "I am now sure," he exclaimed, "that I know who you are, untold." For in that singular but striking and regular beauty;

beauty; and that expression, now fierce and now kind, now mournful and now disdainful, Lord Shirley beheld a manly likeness of Lucy Merle, and was convinced that this mysterious being must be her brother; and he concluded also that the likeness in her, which he had often and vainly endeavoured to trace, was to the young recruit he had seen when he was with his regiment.

“Well, who am I then?” asked the deserter.

“I believe you must, from the likeness you bear her, be the brother of Lucy Merle, though I never knew or suspected that she had a brother.”

“No—you can’t suppose I was a brother to boast of,” replied he with a bitter smile: “but I am her brother; and I am come to tell you my story, because I hope what I have to say may serve that angel of whom you have proved yourself unworthy,

unworthy, by believing her guilty of impossible crimes to such a being as she is."

"Proced," said the earl, "I am all attention."

After a pause of some emotion Lawson Merle began his narration; and declared himself to have been, even from his earliest years, the slave of profligacy, and the companion of the low and the vicious;—that his father, tired of maintaining him and of answering his demands for money, had cast him off at a very early age; and that his mother had continued to see and assist him, till poverty prevented her doing the latter, and his father having become a bankrupt sailed for America. Soon after his mother removed to London, and took charge of Miss Shirley. He, meanwhile, joined a gang of smugglers; and having been severely wounded in an engagement with  
some

some excisemen, whence he contrived to escape with his liberty, he had prevailed on his mother to admit him into her house, and nurse him during his very painful confinement. During his recovery, Miss Shirley used to condescend to assist Lucy in endeavours to amuse and amend him; and by reading the Scriptures and other good books to him, she had endeavoured to teach him the error of his ways, and lead a sinner to repentance, by disclosing to him the only path to salvation. But, while vainly trying to inspire Lawson Merle with piety, Catherine unfortunately inspired him with love; and in a moment of ungovernable passion he dared to own his regard and sue for a return.

When the deserter reached this period of his story, Lord Shirley turned very pale, and a sort of indignant disdainful expression, spite of himself, was visible  
in



in his countenance. But his strange guest seemed not to heed it, and went on as follows:

“ You may think I was a very impudent dog to do this, my lord, and so I was perhaps: but women had flattered me on my person; and I was fool enough to suppose all women pretty much alike: but that angel taught me to know better. (Here Lord Shirley began to breathe freely again.) You may think she put herself in a passion, and so forth; but then I should only have thought her coy, and persisted to tease her;—but no such thing—coolly, calmly, and like a lady, she thanked me for my high opinion of her; but assured me, had I been an emperor, instead of poor Lawson Merle, that she never could have loved me, as it was impossible for her to love a man of vicious habits and profligate principles; but that she trusted my being capable of loving her was a  
proof



proof I was not wholly irreclaimable, and that I had her best wishes and her prayers. Her cold manner, and her rational way of talking, immediately convinced me that she had not the least liking to me; so, feeling desperate, I threatened to kill myself. But she advised me not, for my own sake, as I was not fit to die:—this made me still more declare that I would kill myself, in order to frighten her into giving me hope. But she assured me that she only despised me the more for the base unworthy threat, and that my death would not sit heavy on her conscience, if I put my threat in execution.—Well, I did her one good service, however; for I bullied away that rascal, that Melvyn. O that I had done more! that I had killed him!”

Here indignant emotion, in which Lord Shirley participated, deprived the deserter of the power of utterance. At  
length

length he continued thus :—" Yes ; the scoundrel dared to follow her, dared to think of her, not as I did, but as what I will not name ; but I ' scared his coward soul,' as the woman says in the play : I forbade him to walk before our door, and trembling and sneakingly he obeyed."

" Villain !" muttered Lord Shirley.

" Aye, I am pure to him ; for I, with all my faults, never wronged innocence : and yet this fellow you could believe, Lord Shirley, rather than your angel wife !"

" Go on, I have suffered enough for my fault."

" Well, as soon as my health returned, habit and necessity, and the despair of my heart, drove me to my old haunts and my old associates. One day I wanted money, and I knew my mother had saved that very sum to send to my father. Accordingly, I came to her and insisted on having  
it ;

it: she refused, and in her presence I broke open her bureau, took the money, and left the house. Soon after, I enlisted in your grenadier troop; whence, as you know, I deserted. But now, before I go on, I will explain the secret that has, I find, been made use of by that Melvyn in order to involve Lady Shirley in suspicion."

"Ha! I am all attention," said Lord Shirley.

"Why, when I had robbed my poor mother, she, who is a violent, vindictive woman, fell on her knees before Miss Shirley and Lucy, whom her screams had called into the room; and after telling them what I had done, she was beginning to curse me in the most horrible manner, when the terrified girls stopped her, and conjured her to forbear. My mother had been long ashamed of me, and neither she nor my father ever spoke of me:  
but

but Miss Shirley, disapproving with her christian spirit this unnatural disregard even of a guilty child like me, used always to talk of me, and encouraged Lucy to do so too. My mother, therefore, in order to secure herself from any future mention of one whom she thought a disgrace to her, declared to Miss Shirley, that unless she would take a solemn oath never to acknowledge to any one that she had a son, and never to name me to her or any one else, or even seem to know of my existence, she would call down the most awful curses on my head. The idea of hearing a parent curse a child was too horrible to be endured by either Miss Shirley or poor Lucy ; and they both took the oath required of them by my mother. Yes, yes ; my mother did not curse me. Miss Shirley prevented that—God bless her ! No, no—she did not curse me !” And forgetting that he left his pistols at  
the

the command of Lord Shirley, the wretched man started up, and walked up and down the room in agony insupportable. Lord Shirley rose also ; and then the deserter, aware of his defenceless state, turned hastily round, looking wistfully at the pistols. But one glance at the tearful eyes of Lord Shirley re-assured him ; and the earl kindly approaching him, said, “ Sit down and compose yourself ; your present agony shows me that you are not yet lost to all hope of amendment, and you may command my services to the utmost. Nay, believe me, whatever agony Catherine’s secret has cost me, I care not, since it was the means of saving you from a parent’s curse.”

The poor man wrung Lord Shirley’s hand in silence ; but the next moment exclaimed, with a hoarse voice, “ Lord Shirley, do not think to make me like you ! I hate you ! it is my pride to hate you for your usage of her ; and I scorn to owe you an obligation.” Then seizing one of

his pistols, he stood looking on the earl in fierce defiance.

“Be it as you please,” said Lord Shirley coldly. And the deserter continued: “Well, having deserted, I came to London in disguise, and there I heard that Miss Shirley was living with her grandfather, and going to be married to you. The idea of her belonging to another maddened me with jealousy. You may remember that you reproved me on the parade for disobedience of orders, and you observed how insolently I regarded you.”

“Yes; and when your sister looked angry, I always wondered what and who it was that she reminded me of.”

“Well, from that hour I was prepared to hate you; and your being my rival made me hate you most fiercely. I wrote such a letter to Miss Shirley!—a letter threatening your life. Yes; and as she had seen me in disguise, she saw and knew me in the crowd as you led her along  
the

the piazza at St. James's. I saw her turn pale with terror, and I had a malignant pleasure in alarming her for your life."

"Now then her mysterious emotion is explained—and how satisfactorily!"

"Aye, and, depend upon it, as satisfactorily will every other appearance against her be cleared up. Luckily for you and her, I was soon after forced to fly for my life, and to leave England. I returned, and found you married! The evening I climbed up your balcony I was half drunk, and, when I did it, did not know what I intended to do when I got there: but that voice, that look, when she commanded me to disappear, sobered me instantly, and as usual made her obeyed. But Oh, what a rage I was in when I found that fellow in the crowd below, and on losing my disguise saw that he knew me again!"

"I am anxious indeed," said Lord Shirley, "to know what could be the cause



of the intercourse relative to you, which existed between Lady Shirley and him."

"I will tell you—One morning, Melvyn with one or two more came by way of frolic to the Finish in Covent Garden, where I was drinking and smoking. The sight of him was poison to me: but he called me on one side, and offered me for Lady Shirley's sake, as he knew that she was interested in me, his purse, and interest in any way I would command; and that he would consult with her how best to serve me. He then asked my name. I refused to give it; but one of my companions called me Jack Lawson, the name I went by."

Lord Shirley here heaved a deep sigh, for he recollected only too well the name of Jack Lawson.

"I suppose," continued Merle, "that on pretence of wanting to contrive to do something for me, he got Lady Shirley to talk to him. I told him that I scorned to have any thing to say to him; and hoped I  
had



had got rid of him, for I saw that he wanted to get out of me what I was or had been to Lady Shirley. But he came again in search of me to the Finish, and found me there; and then, when he began to pump me, I told him if he did not go away I'd knock him down; and the dastard never appeared again. Well, I have little more to say; except that one night as I passed the back part of this house, I saw Lady Shirley pass the bow-window with a candle in her hand; and being in liquor I resolved to scale the window and talk with her once more; and *you know* that I *did* so."

"Yes, yes—I know it but too well!" replied Lord Shirley sighing.

"Soon after I went to Guernsey, where, in a coffee-house, I overheard one gentleman relating to another the whole story of Lady Shirley and this rascal; and that Melvyn had declared he was no seducer, but that his knowledge that Lady Shirley had a secret unknown to her husband, relating  
to

to a very handsome man who had appeared in her balcony, had first emboldened him to make love to her. I was almost frantic at what I heard ; and starting up, I exclaimed with a horrible oath, ' That Melvyn is a liar and a villain, and Lady Shirley an injured angel ! ' I then rushed out of the room, and never rested till I was on-board ship, and was landed in England and reached your house. Yes, thought I, at all risks to myself I will come and justify her as far as I am concerned ; and if I lose my life in her service, it will be well lost :—For with Melvyn," added he with a terrible expression of countenance, " I have yet to settle ! "

" And now," said he, rising, " I have no more business here."

" Stay, and receive my best thanks," said Lord Shirley ; " and something more that will reward your generous zeal."

" Thanks ! You owe me none. I came for her sake, not yours—and reward, except

cept the reward of my own heart, I scorn."

"You will not scorn the reward I have to offer—Read that letter." It was the letter to Catherine.

Lawson Merle did read the letter, and with strong emotion. Then returning it he said, "Now I forgive you," and retreated suddenly the way he came.—But not with his presence vanished his image, or the recollection of him, from Lord Shirley's mind; and with his wonted benevolence he began to contrive schemes to serve and save the wretched man, spite of himself. But so sweet and so sure, however unconsciously felt, is the influence of a truly virtuous and pious woman, that Lord Shirley, while meditating how to serve Lawson Merle, was referring in idea every thing he intended to do, to the opinion of his absent wife; and, owing to the active piety which he had caught from her, was bent as much on the spiritual improvement as on the temporal good of the object of his benevo-

benevolent anxiety. And even when most deeply impressed with a sense of Catherine's guilt, he had always rigidly adhered to her regular and pious habits and ordinances in the government of his family. He had even bitterly repented having been led by an intemperate wish of revenge into the crime of duelling,—a crime, of the magnitude of which, in a professed Christian and sincere believer, she and she alone had taught him to be sensible: and while in every habit of his life he still felt and acknowledged her pure and even holy influence, how often, and at last how thoroughly, had the conviction forced itself on his mind, that the woman who, by a constant series of virtuous, pious, and consistent conduct, had acquired such an ascendancy over his feelings and actions, could not, however appearances might be against her, be capable of deserving the slightest imputation of guilt!

Lord Shirley had passed near an hour in  
reverie

reverie on this and other subjects, when a ringing at the gate was heard ; and the servant rushed in, telling his lord that a man wounded and apparently dying had been found in the road near the park gates ; and he begged to know what was to be done with him. Lord Shirley gave orders for his instant admittance, and desired that the nearest surgeon might be sent for. Then hastening himself to see that his orders were executed in the best possible manner, he met the servants bearing in the wounded man ; and beheld with unutterable emotion the wretched brother of Lucy Merle ! At first Lord Shirley was too much affected to speak : and the wounded man, seeing his emotion, turned on him a look expressive of gratitude.

“ Let the least noisy room in the house be got ready,” cried Lord Shirley. “ My poor fellow !” he added, “ as this sad accident was to happen, I am glad it happened here, as we will take good care of you.”

The poor man, to whom the language

of kindness from any one had long been a stranger, felt his lip quiver with sensations unusual to it, and again he thanked Lord Shirley by his eyes.

“How did this happen?” asked Lord Shirley.

“I will tell you some other time when we are alone,” whispered Merle. And the chamber being ready, he was conveyed to it, followed by Lord Shirley.

When alone with him, he told the earl that he had been way-laid by a couple of excisemen, who owed him a grudge, and had been on the watch for his return from Guernsey; that one of them had treacherously shot him in the back, while he was defending himself against the other; and that fancying him dead and hearing some one coming up they had run away, leaving him senseless and bleeding on the ground.

Luckily, the servants met the surgeon near the park gates: and with no little anxiety did Lord Shirley await his opinion of the poor sufferer's wound; as, however

ever worthless his life, the idea that he had risked it for the sake of Catherine, and that but on her account he would still have been safe at Guernsey, gave great pain to the heart of Lord Shirley, and made the wretched man an object of great interest in his eyes. The unhappy young man was perfectly conscious; and as Lord Shirley, bending over him and kindly supporting his languid head, expressed his sorrow for his situation, especially as he had suffered from his exertions in Lady Shirley's cause, a look of satisfaction lighted up the fast-closing eye of the sufferer; and when Lord Shirley added, "I am going to send for the very best advice from London," the dying man turned his eyes with a most touching expression of gratitude on his anxious supporter, and, seizing his hand, pressed it affectionately to his bosom. It was the last effort of expiring nature; and after one short struggle, all was entirely over.

CHAP.



## CHAPTER VI.

LUCY Merle's voyage to America, though of longer duration than an American voyage generally is, was marked by no very interesting event, and productive of little variety. Had Lucy wished it, she might have been the object of even marked attention to many of the gentlemen on-board: and it was evident that one of her fellow-passengers, an opulent merchant at Philadelphia, was desirous of trying his fortune with her as a lover. But as Lucy was firmly resolved never to marry, she always on principle discouraged attentions from the other sex: and her disappointed lover had not an opportunity of addressing a single word to her, except in reply to the questions which she addressed generally to the Americans on-board, relative to the customs and manners of the country



country which she was going to inhabit.—  
At length land drew near, and Lucy was welcomed on shore by her expecting parents.

It was some years now since Lucy had seen her father : and little aware how sottish habits impair the beauty of person and of countenance, and still less that such had been the habits of her father,—that father whom she had fondly imagined a model of republican virtue, as he professed republican principles,—she almost started back with surprise and grief at hearing herself hailed by the endearing name of *child*, by a squalid, bloated, feeble being, in whose still fine outline only could she trace any resemblance to that image which her fancy had so long delighted to retain. And as she threw herself on his neck, tears of apprehension and disappointment mingled with those of tenderness and welcome.

She found that Mr. Merle had obtained  
ed

ed employment as clerk in a merchant's house, and that her mother by keeping a little day-school was endeavouring to increase their little income, which the expensive habits of her husband had always forestalled. Great therefore was the delight of the parents, and still greater that of the affectionate daughter, to know that the bounty of the general had bestowed on the latter an income sufficient for all the reasonable wants both of them and herself: and as Mr. Merle's increasing infirmities made all application to business painful to him, and the employment which his necessity obliged him to had always been humbling to his pride, he eagerly resigned it, and desired that his wife would also give up teaching A B C to babies. But Lucy, and Mrs. Merle also, thought it better that she should continue her school long enough to be able to make its emoluments sufficient to pay off some of the debts they had contracted; and Mr. Merle reluctantly

reluctantly consented, as his pride was much hurt by the consciousness, that even in this republican land his wife was considered as not visitable by the rich and powerful, because she kept a school.

It seemed as if Catherine had foreseen that Lucy would find her improvident father in a state of insolvency; since, besides the very handsome supply of clothes which she had insisted on bestowing on Lucy, far more than sufficient as an outfit for her voyage, she had inclosed in a most affectionate letter bills of exchange on a house at ———, which, in case she wanted more than her half-year's dividend for any immediate emergency, were convertible into money directly: and such was the state of her father's affairs, that Lucy was glad to avail herself immediately of the precautionary kindness of her generous friend. Nor did Lucy's pride object to her receiving pecuniary obligation from the friend she loved. Had I been in her situation,

tuation, I would have done the same for her, thought Lucy ; and that consciousness removed all objections.

But Lucy and her parents needed not have wanted any thing that money could procure, could the former have borne to listen to the addresses of the merchant who had been her fellow-passenger to America ; and so liberal were his offers to her, that she underwent much persecution from Mr. and Mrs. Merle on the subject. But Lucy, supported by conscious integrity, was firm in her refusal even to give her lover an opportunity of winning her affections.

“ You know,” she said to her parents, “ that my own peculiar feelings and my ideas of moral rectitude will not suffer me to marry any one ; therefore I will not run the risk of exposing either myself or another to the misery of a hopeless attachment.”

At her scruples they laughed ; against  
her

her obstinacy they inveighed: but Lucy persisted, and her lover reluctantly withdrew.

To resign the idea of marriage with this gentleman, and with two others who succeeded him, was no trial to the heart of Lucy Merle, and she hoped that she should never know the feeling of hopeless love. But the time was at hand when she was doomed to experience its power, and from a quarter whence she little expected; and she learnt too soon that the path of rigid duty is rarely one of flowers and sunshine.

It was soon only too evident that her father was rapidly declining, the victim of his intemperance. Luckily for Lucy's comfort she retained for him no affection but that of habit; so thoroughly did she now appreciate his character, and see in his conduct the slave of self-indulgence, not the temperate self-denying republican. Still it was very painful to her to know that he was every day drawing nearer to his dissolution,

lution, the victim of his vices—and those vices unrepented of. But for her to minister to this callous, vitiated mind, she knew to be impossible: all therefore that she could do she did to the utmost of her power; and as going from place to place by water-carriage was the greatest relief of which his restless malady was susceptible, Lucy procured for him every accommodation necessary to make these voyages as little fatiguing to him as possible: and sometimes there were persons on-board these moving hotels, as some of these boats might be called, whose power of anecdote amused the otherwise irritable invalid.

One day, while they were on-board a vessel of this description, a smart English servant came out of one of these apartments, and begged to know whether any lady had a bottle of salts or aromatic vinegar, as his lord was very ill with the head-ache.

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The servant probably spoke of his lord with an air of consequence, and as if he expected to excite in his American hearers as much respect by that appellation as it would have procured him from English ones. But he was mistaken : and a native American replied rather coarsely, "*We* republicans, friend, do not use such things,—they may do very well for *lords*, but not for *men*." And the man was retiring disappointed and distressed, when Lucy stepped forward, and offered him a *vinagrilia* which Catherine had given her, and on which was engraved the name of Catherine Shirley.

This action of Lucy's was witnessed with a sarcastic smile ; but she regarded it not : she would have done the same for any one who needed assistance ; and the idea of assisting an English lord was pleasant to her feelings, since for the sake of  
 Lord



Lord Shirley she was inclined to think complacently of the whole peerage.

Of Lord Livesay she rarely thought; but when she did, it was with a feeling of gratitude for his intentions towards herself, and respect for the rational self-command which had led him to fly from the temptation to which it would have been weak in him to yield. Still it was not without surprise mingled with pleasurable emotion, that, issuing from a contiguous apartment with her *vinagrilia* in his hand, Lucy beheld Lord Livesay himself; who, seeing the name of Catherine Shirley on the box, had felt curious to know who the beautiful young lady was, as his servant described her to be, that possessed a trinket bearing a name so honoured and so beloved: nor could the young peer discover without excessive delight that the possessor of the valuable trinket was Lucy Merle.

Pleasure



Pleasure sparkled almost equally in the eyes of both, and deepened the mantling colour of their cheeks on this unexpected rencontre; though, after the first joyful emotion at meeting had subsided, Lucy's manner resumed its usual reserve, and Lord Livesay saw that her joy at seeing *him* was not likely to be as permanent as his at meeting with *her*.

But he had so much to ask, and she so much to answer, relative to those in whom they were equally interested, that Lucy could not help giving the young peer her almost undivided attention; and before the voyage was at an end, Lucy found that the thoughtless, dissipated youth, who had been made known to her under such unpromising circumstances, was become a reading, thinking, industrious man, travelling for information, and eager to do all the good which a very considerable

siderable increase of fortune in America had enabled him to do.

A relation of his mother's, who was an American, had died some months previous to this rencontre with Lucy, and had left him a considerable tract of land in Rhode Island, of which he had come over to take possession. And having made all his slaves free, and in every thing displayed the noble feelings of his generous nature, he was going the tour of the United States as a private gentleman when he met Lucy on-board the boat.

When Lucy presented Lord Livesay to her parents, he blushed, from recollecting that Lord Shirley (as one means of disgusting him with a marriage with the daughter) had told him that he would make him acquainted with the mother. And Lucy, though not conscious why Lord Livesay blushed, felt herself blush also. But  
the

the young peer was agreeably disappointed in Mrs. Merle's appearance : he saw not her vulgarity ; for he had not lately associated with women of much refinement, and Mrs Merle was, he thought, quite on a par in breeding with her republican neighbours, while in point of personal beauty she was excelled only by her daughter. And Mr. Merle's manners were certainly those of a gentleman. Long before the termination of the voyage obliged Lord Livesay to take leave of his new acquaintances, his preference of Lucy had become a decided passion, and he had resumed his intention of paying his addresses to her, " For why," thought Lord Livesay, " should not I live in America ? With her I should be happy any where ; and her country shall be my country :—and here, where all ranks are equal, no one can object to my choice on the ground of inequality of birth."

To

To be brief: Lord Livesay, though withheld some time by the timidity always attendant on true love, had courage at last to reveal his passion to Lucy with the delighted approbation of her parents, but received from her a firm and positive rejection,—a rejection, too, so coldly and composedly given, that Lord Livesay could not for a moment suspect, that in her heart there lived a preference as decided and as tender as his own; and that the woman who thus refused to be his wife, felt for him all the faithful and devoted fondness that distinguishes a virtuous woman's love. Lord Livesay, agonized beyond the power of words to express; wrung his hands in silence, and rushed out of the house.

I will not describe the scene that succeeded when her parents were informed of this second and more unaccountable rejection. But in vain did they argue; in  
vain

vain did they plead; in vain reproach her with her want of obedience and filial piety.—“There is a duty, and a strong one too, that I owe you,” cried Lucy, “but it is a more binding one still that I owe to my Creator. Even were it possible for me to conquer my repugnance to become the wife of any man, while I have a brother whose life may be at any moment forfeited to the laws of his country, and I be therefore the means of unmerited disgrace to the husband who had honoured me by his choice;—even, I say, could I conquer this well-principled reluctance, I could not marry without being allowed to reveal the existence of this unhappy brother; and that I am bound by oath not to reveal without your consent—which consent you refuse.”

“To be sure,” exclaimed her father: “for scarcely any man would marry you if it were known what sort of man your

brother was; and you must be an ungrateful child, as well as a weak foolish woman, to reproach us with what we mean entirely for your good."

"To deceive the man she marries cannot be conducive even to a woman's earthly good; for accident might reveal the deception, and—"

"Deception! it is no deception. You are not asked whether you have a brother, therefore you do not deceive in not saying that you have one."

"Our ideas of right and wrong on this subject are so totally at variance," cried Lucy, "that we cannot talk on it: but I must act up to my own ideas, not yours; and I tell you once for all, that if I am allowed to reveal this secret to Lord Livesay I will see him again; and if, knowing that this disgraceful connexion exists, he persists in wishing to marry me, I am willing to be his wife."

"No;

“No ; you shall be his wife without : for I am very sure,” replied Mrs. Merle, seconded by her husband, “that he will not marry you if he knows what you have to tell him.”

“Then it is my wish,” cried Lucy as she left the room, “that he and I may meet no more.” And she said this with so much sorrow in her tone and countenance, that her mother was convinced she loved Lord Livesay ; and instantly dispatched a note to the earl begging him not to give over his suit, because she was sure in her heart that her daughter loved him.

Lucy meanwhile had locked herself into her chamber, a prey to overwhelming emotions ; amongst which, however, the consciousness of unblemished integrity shone proudly preeminent. “I have been enabled to act up to my principles, and according to my sense of duty,” she exclaimed, raising her tearful eyes and clasped hands to heaven : “and I am



thankful even in the midst of suffering." For it was no longer on republican but on Christian grounds that Lucy built her superstructure of virtue for herself or others. She had found the inefficacy of the first ; she had seen in the practice of many around her, but especially in the conduct of her parents, how little integrity was the result of mere moral axioms and political opinions ; and she became convinced that human beings must have purer and higher motives of action, more effectual incentives to good, and more powerful restrainers from evil.

"Lady Shirley was right," thought Lucy ; "her standard was always Christianity, while mine was republicanism. I am convinced, and I bless God that I am so."

She might indeed be thankful for the change ; for at this moment of hopeless and well-founded tenderness, at this hour of strong temptation to offend against integrity, because the interests of her love  
were



were at variance with her principles,—where was she to look for consolation under misery, and strength to resist the pleadings of her heart, but from that “Help which faileth not,” and from that faith which teaches entire reliance on the goodness and mercy of Him who alone knows what is best for us ?

Lord Livesay was unable immediately to act upon the hint which Mrs. Merle had given him to continue his visits, as Mr. Merle, after a few hours illness, the very day after Lucy had rejected him, breathed his last in the arms of his almost frantic wife, whose grief partook of the violent nature of her temper, and who for some days was a prey to the most clamorous and ungovernable sorrow. But as soon as its first violence was passed, she resumed her old habits; and was provoked to find that Lucy, whose quiet sorrow she had denominated a proof of want

want of love for her father, still continued to grieve as much as she had done at first; and in order to tease Lucy, she sent to beg that Lord Livesay would give them daily as much of his company as he could.

It was not in nature for Lord Livesay to resist this invitation; nor could Lucy always deny herself the pleasure of conversing with him; though, generally speaking, she forced herself to retire to her room soon after his entrance. The consequence was to both an increase of attachment: but while Lord Livesay hoped, Lucy, knowing what he did not know, utterly despaired.

At this time Mrs. Merle received poor Lady Shirley's letter, requesting most earnestly to receive what she so strenuously desired even to the last moment of her remaining in London, viz. permission to disclose to her Lord, and to him alone, the whole story of her wretched son, and  
to

to explain the mystery which had so often disturbed Lord Shirley's peace of mind.

Catherine, though averse to bribe any one to do only an act of common justice, was now induced, by a sense of what she owed to her husband, to add, that she was willing to purchase this permission, by giving any sum of money for it which Mrs. Merle might require. "There—Lady Shirley talks sense now," cried Mrs. Merle, handing the letter to her daughter; "and I will hear reason. For money I will do what she requires."

"How!—to be sure you will not take money for doing your duty to one to whom I owe so much?"

"To be sure I will. As you will not enrich me or yourself by marrying as I would have you, I must enrich myself as I can: so write to Lady Shirley, and tell her that I value the leave she asks, that is, to absolve her from her oath, at a thousand  
sand

sand guineas.” And Lucy retired in an agony of wounded feeling to her chamber.

A few days after, Lucy had the further mortification of hearing from her mother that she had accepted the addresses of a merchant who lived near them ; and that before the year of her mourning was out she intended to become a wife again ; assuring Lucy that she had told her lover she should not come to him portionless, for that she expected to present him with a thousand guineas.

Lucy therefore no longer delayed to write to Lady Shirley ; and was only supported under this increased pressure of conscious wretchedness, by her consistent and confiding piety.

But she was soon to undergo a still greater trial to her affectionate heart ; for, having borrowed several English papers at once, she read in one obscure hints that a matrimonial *fracas* had taken place in high life,

life, between a noble earl and his countess, remarkable for her beauty, her talents, and her *piety* (piety in italics); and that the general her g——r had not been able to settle the dispute, which originated in jealousy of Mr. M——n. The next paper was fuller in its details, and inserted the initials of Lord S—— and Lady S——; till at length the wondering and agitated Lucy read in the last paper, that Lady Shirley, separated from her lord in consequence of being strongly suspected of a criminal connexion with Mr. Melvyn, was gone to Ireland with General Shirley; and her wretched lord, with his children, had shut himself up in his country-seat.

“ I will not believe it. ’Tis all a newspaper calumny,” cried Lucy with the most violent indignation. “ But I will send instantly for Lord Livesay, perhaps he has letters from England.” And at

this moment of agitation she was told that Lord Livesay was with her mother.

Lucy instantly ran into the room, and turned very pale on seeing the excessive agitation of her noble lover. "What does this mean?" cried Lucy, pointing to the paragraph in the paper of the latest date.

"It means falsehood, fraud, malice, I think," replied Lord Livesay. "Nothing can ever make me believe Lady Shirley guilty."

"Bless you! bless you for that, my dear lord!" said Lucy bursting into tears. "No," she resumed, struggling with her tears: "no—she can't be guilty; and Lord Shirley must have been imposed upon.—But have you no letter?"

"Yes—read that, which gives, you see, an account of the whole affair."

Lucy did read it, till she could read no more: but a mist came over her eyes, and she was for a few moments, though not insen-

insensible, almost unable to stand, or think, or move.

“It is evident to me,” cried the earl, “that there has been some foul play in this business ; and my angelic friend must be wretched wherever she is.”

“My dear mother,” said Lucy starting up, but falling back again on her seat, “have I your leave to go to England? Indeed, if you refuse me, I do not think that I shall be able to keep my senses.”

“Then go—for I am sure I know not of what use you are to me, as you do nothing but mope all day long ;—so go as soon as you please.”

Lord Livesay during this speech was excessively agitated. And on Lucy’s saying, “When do you think a packet will sail for England?” he answered, in a voice almost inarticulate from strong emotion, “A very swift-sailing frigate sails tomorrow—I have already taken my passage in  
in

in it, to hasten to my poor friend ; and I only came hither to take leave."

" Dear ! how fortunate !" cried the indelicate mother. " Then you and Lucy can go together !"

How unfortunate rather ! thought her more rightly-feeling daughter ; when Lord Livesay, aware of what was passing in her mind, assured her with great solemnity of manner, that if she would consent to go in the same ship with himself,—and as there was no other to sail soon, friendship required her to surmount the otherwise proper scruples of her delicacy,—he would pledge himself in any way she chose, not to approach her as a lover at all (and never without her leave) during the whole of the voyage.

But Lucy's propriety of feeling made her resolve to follow in another ship, however eager she might be to hasten to Lady Shirley in disgrace and adversity.

And



And as a ship unexpectedly sailed the day after Lord Livesay did, she was not much distressed by the self-denial she had practised; and she arrived in England soon after Lord Livesay.

When Lord Livesay landed, he hastened to London, where he had business to transact: but Lucy proceeded thence, as fast as four horses could carry her, to the seat of Lord Shirley.

## CHAPTER VII.

LORD SHIRLEY was scarcely risen the next day, when he was summoned down to a lady in the drawing-room. And he beheld with indescribable emotion Lucy Merle herself.

Lord Shirley's feelings, moved and softened as they had just been by the late scene with Lawson Merle and his untimely end, were prepared to be awakened almost to an agony of tenderness, by the sight of the sister, and by all the associations connected with her. Eagerly therefore did he advance to welcome her, and would have folded her to his heart with the affection of a brother; but retreating from him with a look that forcibly reminded him of Lawson Merle, Lucy coldly said, "My lord, I come not hither

as

as a friend—I cannot regard as such the husband who could desert, and believe guilty, such a wife and woman as Lady Shirley. I only come to ask you where she is, that I may hasten to her ; and if it be disgrace that she is enduring, it is my first wish to be a partaker of it through life.”

“ The wish and the determination are worthy of you,” replied Lord Shirley ; “ and I should rejoice to know that Lady Shirley had such a companion—but—”

“ But what, my lord ?”

“ Read this—and if you can, forgive me !” ’Twas a copy of the letter to Catherine, expressing his entire belief in her innocence, and his earnest entreaty to be allowed to bring her back to her home again.

Lucy was pleased and affected : still she owned, with her usual candour, that she could not excuse his not believing her innocent from the first ; and she persisted

sisted in her wish of setting off for Ireland immediately.

“Not alone,” said Lord Shirley—  
“one of my maid servants and a man shall go with you. On no other terms will I let you know where Lady Shirley is.” But here his voice faltered, and his lip quivered, as he added, “Dear Miss Merle, you have a brother—an unfortunate brother!”

“You know then—you know all!” cried Lucy turning pale.

“Yes—and I know him : he has been here.” Then, not waiting for further questions, Lord Shirley described her brother’s visit, and the generous motives that prompted it ; and declared himself so pleased with the good feelings that it evinced, and such a respectable capability of fully appreciating the worth of Lady Shirley, that he felt convinced he had had noble qualities, however they had been choked up by vice and vicious companions,  
Lucy,

Lucy, who had often wept bitter tears over her brother's vices, now had the satisfaction of weeping sweet and tender ones over, she trusted, the deserved praises of his merits; and she suffered her memory to dwell once more on the image of that brother, the companion and play-fellow of her childhood, beloved through all his errors, and regretted spite of his baneful influence over her own prospects, till the tender wishes of her heart found utterance at her lips, and she exclaimed, "O dear, dear Lawson! would I could but see thee again!—My lord, I have been even forbidden to name him! but I may talk of him now; and you say that I may praise him too. O that I could but see him once again!"

Lord Shirley rose from his seat, walked across the room, stirred the fire, walked back again to his seat, unable to disclose to Lucy, that the brother still so dear to  
her

her heart existed no longer. At length, however, in order to give her time and himself too to recover from the influence of such strong emotions, he asked her questions concerning her voyage; and Lucy with much embarrassment owned that Lord Livesay accompanied her.

“Livesay in England! I rejoice to hear it. Have you seen much of him in America?”

“A great deal—more than I wished or approved; and far more than you, my lord, would think proper.”

“I understand you—And Livesay is your lover, I suppose?”

“He is—but not accepted.”

“No! and are you really insensible to his merit?”

Lucy blushed, sighed, and turned away. After a while she told Lord Shirley, under a solemn promise of secrecy, the reasons of her resolution never to marry, which had so often excited his wonder,  
and

and which, when now explained, excited equally his respect and admiration.

“Then, may I hope,” said Lord Shirley, “that it was not dislike of my friend, but honour alone that made you reject his addresses?”

“Honour only. But Lord Livesay does not know this; for I thought that he would get the better of his attachment sooner, if he thought I was indifferent to him.”

“Noble girl!” cried Lord Shirley; “and I trust that such conduct will not be unrewarded. But—” Here he turned away, and walked again in perturbed silence up and down the room; for, though he felt that Lawson Merle’s death would remove every obstacle to Lord Livesay’s wishes, he knew what agony he should inflict on the generous disinterested girl before him, when he informed her of her brother’s death. But at last he took courage, and, grasping Lucy’s hand,

hand, said, “ You wish to see your brother again; and you shall see him if you choose it, as he is here, he is in this house.”

“ In this house?” exclaimed Lucy, trembling and pale with emotion, for she feared she knew not what,—“ Then where is he. Let me see him instantly !”

“ Not yet;—he is ill, he has been wounded.”

“ Wounded ! Oh ! not by his own hand ? Do not tell me that.”

“ No. By the hands of treachery. His visit here was watched, and when he left me he was set upon by ruffians : therefore, dear girl, be comforted by knowing that, though he is dead, he fell a victim to a good and not a base action,—he fell from his exertions in our dear Catherine’s cause ! since, but for her sake, he would now have been safe in Guernsey.”

There was consolation in that thought. But at that moment Lucy could not feel  
its



its power, and Lord Shirley wisely allowed her to vent her feelings unrestrainedly in tears. As soon as she could speak she begged to be allowed to see the body.

“You shall,” said Lord Shirley, “if you will promise to restrain your feelings as much as possible.”

“I will try to obey you,” said Lucy. Then turning round, she said in a firmer tone, “Now I am ready to attend you,” and gave her hand to Lord Shirley. But the moment she beheld the dead body, beheld as a corpse the being ever dear to her heart, though so long and fatally a stranger to her sight, and beheld him in the very prime of life snatched away with all his unrepented sins upon his head, her self-possession forsook her, and she fell in an agony of tears and suffocating sobs upon the unconscious corpse; while with all the first delirious feelings of affliction she called him by every fond and tender name,  
and

and conjured him to speak to her, telling him that she brought him his father's forgiveness on his death-bed.

Lord Shirley gently raised her from the body, and reminded her of her promise to be calm, or that he must in kindness remove her from the chamber. This threat recalled Lucy to herself, and her feelings took another and a more soothing turn; for, falling on her knees, she raised her hands and eyes for some moments in silent prayer: then saying "I have now done for him the only duty I can do," she pressed her warm lip to his cold unconscious one, and allowed Lord Shirley to lead her to the apartment prepared for her, where she was prevailed on by the attendant to undress and go to bed. Nor did she appear again till the next day; when Lord Shirley told her that he had just received a letter from Lord Livesay, announcing his intention of being with him the next morning.

“Then

“Then it is the more proper,” said Lucy, “that I should set off for Ireland this evening, though I am loth to go away and leave the last tribute to the dead unpaid.”

“That tribute I myself will pay, and probably Livesay will join me in it.—Yes, it may be as well that you should go, accompanied as I have told you that you must be ; and in a short time, if I am forgiven,—and, O Miss Merle, I conjure you to be my advocate,—my young friend and I shall hope to follow you :—remember, all obstacles to his success are now removed.”

“This is not a time, my lord, for me to think of any thing of the kind,” replied Lucy blushing. “But while you order horses for me, I will go prepare for my journey, and take my last leave of him whom I shall see no more.”

Lucy visited the corpse of her brother  
for

for the last time; and in a few hours more was on her road to Ireland and her friend; and as it was remarkably fine weather for the month of February, she proceeded on her journey with safety and with speed.

The next day Lord Livesay arrived, and had so much to communicate of importance to Lord Shirley and to Catherine, that the good news of his probable success as a lover, when told him, served as a reward for his own interesting information, which shall be reserved for another chapter.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THOUGH Lord Livesay was silent, it had always been his intention, as soon as he reached London, to obtain from persons on the spot all the information that he could, relative to the mysterious affair in which those whom he so highly valued had been such prominent actors. And he found that Melvyn's refusing to fire at Lord Shirley had raised him so much in general opinion, that that circumstance united to the indulgence shown to men on such occasions had kept him in society, and made him admired by some women even more than ever : while many declared, and amongst them were Mrs. Somerley and Lady X——, that Melvyn must have been the seduced, not the seducer ;—as what man, without advances impossible to

be misunderstood, would have thought of attempting the honour of such a pretender to *righteousness overmuch* as Lady Shirley notoriously was?

Lord Livesay, without giving his own sentiments, heard what every one had to say on the subject, and interrogated all those likely to give him information; and amongst the rest the Duchess of C——, who had heard from Catherine's own mouth, before she left London, her account of all the most suspicious circumstances, and believed Lady Shirley's innocence as spotless as her own.

“Alas!” cried Lord Livesay, “while this man is still received, as I am told he is, in society, one presumptive proof of Lady Shirley's innocence is taken away; and those who receive *him* must continue to speak ill of *her*.”

“True,” replied the duchess: “his supposed generous conduct in refusing to  
fire

fire at Lord Shirley, has done much for him with some persons. As for the duke and myself, on no account, as the paramour of a married woman, would we admit him into our house; and believing him, as we do, to be capable of even greater villany, as it is *cold-blooded* vice, I assure you, Lord Livesay, that the very sight of him is horrible to us."

Lord Livesay said nothing in reply, except that "he thought the example of her and her husband ought to be generally followed," and left the house. His resolution was now taken. He called on a gentleman whose services he knew that he might command, and whose honour and courage were of the most distinguished reputation; and after a short conference with him he ordered a post-chaise, and drove to the house of Melvyn.—And now I shall let Lord Livesay speak in his own person.

“ You may suppose, my dear Shirley,” said he, “ that I am not a man to be silent with regard to any obligation that is conferred on me; and you may believe that your generous conduct to me in my distresses was as well known to the circle in which I moved as to myself.”

“ I am sorry for it,” said Lord Shirley. “ But why do you tell me this ?”

“ In order to account for the immediate change of countenance, the pallid cheek and conscious eye of Melvyn, as soon as I followed my own name into his apartment accompanied by my friend : for he was shrewd enough to know instantly that Lord Livesay returned, unexpectedly from America, and calling on him with a countenance too of stern defiance, must come as the friend of the man to whom he owed so much, and also as the avenger of those wrongs of which  
he



he had made Lord Shirley unable to avenge himself."

"What do I hear?—Did you then challenge him? and have you fought? and is he wounded?"

"I know my man better than you, my dear lord; and I hate duelling as much as you do. But let me proceed:—I told him that I was just landed in England, whither I had returned in order to avenge my friend's wrongs on him the injurer; and that I had pistols in my coach, then at the door; that we would drive in search of a second if he wished it, mine being already provided; and then go out of London entirely, or to Chalk Farm, whichever he liked best."

"My friend and I looked steadfastly at him all this time; and we both saw his coward soul tremble within him. After a pause, he said, with a dry and parched lip apparently, 'that he had no quarrel

quarrel against me, and that he could not and would not run a risk of butchering a man in cold blood;—that honour and conscience forbade him to add to the wrongs he had already done Lord Shirley by aiming at his life; and integrity equally forbade him to aim at the life of a man whom he liked as a pleasant companion, and highly respected for the motives of his present hostility.—I repeat it,’ added he, ‘I have no ill-will towards you; and I cannot, will not meet you.’

“ ‘Now then, sir,’ cried I, ‘can you retain your good-will towards me, when I tell you, in presence of this honourable gentleman, that I believe you to be a villain, a mean, vindictive, malignant villain, —the asperser of unblemished virtue, and the base conspirator against the fame of the most spotless of her sex?’

“ O that you had but seen his countenance ! But he uttered not the rage that  
inwardly

inwardly tore him : on the contrary, with uncommon self-command, he said, ‘ *Well*, my lord,—this is manly, this is courageous, to insult a man who has decidedly told you that he will not fight !’

“ ‘ And why will he not ? Because he is a coward,’ replied I, ‘ a sneaking, pitiful coward ; and I will post you every where.’ ”

“ ‘ This is too much to bear.—Gentlemen, I am ready to attend you with or without a second.’ ‘ Without then be it,’ said, I ‘ as it would lose time to go in search of one.’ And we were going out at the door followed by Melvyn, when I saw his countenance change and his whole frame tremble like our friend Acres’s in the play ; and with an oath he declared that he would not fight me, be the consequences what they might : then running up stairs again, he locked himself into his room.

“ This termination of the affair was what  
I wanted,

I wanted, and rejoiced at. I did not want him to fight, but to prove himself a coward by refusing to fight, as I wanted to knock him down from that undeserved height to which his refusal to fire at you had raised him. Accordingly my friend and myself drove to all the coffee-houses and taverns where men of fashion congregate. We also went to the houses of those women of fashion who have countenanced Melvyn, and we told the story in every particular.

“ The consequence was, that at an assembly at Mrs. Somerley’s that evening, he was cut by most of the men and women present who had before admired his heroic forbearance: and I do flatter myself, that, in proportion as he becomes despised, the possibility of his having aspersed Lady Shirley, and contrived himself all the suspicious circumstances against her,

her, will gain ground every day; and that you yourself, my dear Shirley, will cease to admit for one moment the possibility of her guilt."

"You are a generous, noble fellow," said the earl; "and I thank you heartily: and to reward you, I will give you two pieces of information. In the first place, I am already from the suggestions of my own mind entirely convinced of Lady Shirley's innocence, and have written to request her pardon, and permission to fetch her back from Ireland."

"What joy! joy enough at once. I am sure that you cannot go beyond it."

"O yes, I can.—In the second place, know that Lucy Merle loves you, fondly loves you! And the only obstacle to your union with her, an obstacle opposed merely by her noble sense of rectitude,

is now, according to her own account, removed."

Lord Livesay on hearing this did not exclaim "What joy!" The feeling was too delicate, too deep, too sacred for words or exclamations to express: but hiding his face in his handkerchief, he leaned on his elbow in agitated silence, while Lord Shirley described the interesting events of the preceding two days, and ended by cordially approving his union with a woman whose rectitude of principle had proved itself to be equal to the greatest trial, and who was therefore fitted to behave with propriety in any situation which she was called upon to fill.

"You delight me beyond expression," said Lord Livesay, at length, almost inarticulate from emotion. "And she loved me, then, all the time that she treated me so coldly? Her poor brother too! I wish  
that

that he had lived, for I think I could have loved *him* ! Well, I shall have a melancholy satisfaction in joining you in paying the last respect to his memory.

—The father, you know, is dead,—the mother going to be married again ; and Lucy herself does not find a republic, in practice, so charming a thing as she expected. She found where she lived, at least, an aristocracy of wealth as disgusting to her, or more so than the aristocracy of birth ; and though she still thinks a republic in theory a fine thing, she will, I believe, be contented to take England as it is, and to forgive its faults for the sake of its perfections. So, my dear Shirley, am I not a happy fellow in prospect ?”

“ You are,” replied Lord Shirley sighing. “ And if Catherine will forgive and return to me, I, who do not deserve to be as happy as you, may be happy myself, except

except when I am troubled with most compunctious visitings, as I must be, for having ever allowed even circumstances as strong as those against her were, to weigh against the evidence of her character and her virtues. And then to think that you and Lucy and so many did her justice,—while I—” Here Lord Shirley was too much affected to continue the conversation, and Lord Livesay changed the subject.

Four days after, the funeral of Lawson Merle took place. And the poor outcast of his family while living, was followed to his early grave by noble mourners.

The servants knew nothing more than that he was a gentleman known to their master, who had been wounded by ruffians, probably robbers; and the wig and mustachios having fallen off in the struggle, he appeared as himself when brought into the house. And as their lord said that  
he



he was a near relation of Miss Merle's, no wonder was felt that he was treated with such tenderness and attention.

As soon as the funeral was over, Lord Livesay expressed his eager wish to visit the general and Lady Shirley, and tell the former of his meeting with Melvyn. Of his other reasons for wishing to go to Ireland it was not necessary that he should inform Lord Shirley, who approved his going without delay, and was now beginning to tell the hours that might elapse before he could receive an answer from Catherine. At length, about four or five days after Lord Livesay's departure, a letter, in the well-known hand of Catherine, met his eager view.—It was as follows :

“ Then my prayers have been heard !  
and you, my dearest lord, are convinced  
of

my entire innocence,—and merely from the suggestions of your own mind! O blessed tidings! I have then lived long enough!—You will see by this shaking hand, that I have been and am ill; but the sight of you and my dear children will make me quite well again. Hasten then to us, dearest, dearest Shirley! and remember only of our past sorrows what is necessary to enhance, by contrast, the sense of our present happiness.

“Your ever fond and faithful

“CATHERINE SHIRLEY.

“My grandfather and Lucy write by another packet.”

Lord Shirley wept over this short but affectionate and forgiving letter tears of the tenderest gratitude. But he beheld with dismay the imperfect character, so  
unlike

unlike her own ; and a feeling of alarm tempered his sense of joy.—“ I wish that the other letters would come,” thought Lord Shirley, “ that I may hear what they say of her health.”

## CHAPTER IX.

MELVYN's refusal to fight Lord Livesay had lowered him not only in the eyes of men, but women of fashion ; and he had thought it expedient to leave London till the circumstance had ceased to be remembered.

Accordingly, having been much charmed with the beauty of a tradesman's daughter in the town of C——, which was very near a fashionable watering-place, he hired apartments in the town itself, on pretence of being ordered by his physicians to take the hot sea baths at B——. But the young lady in question united so much self-respect, so much virtue, and so much talent to her beauty, that Melvyn soon began to see that he had no chance of obtaining

taining her except on honourable terms ; and his attentions, therefore, soon appeared so serious in their nature, that Sophia Clermont heard that Melvyn was on the point of marriage.

This intelligence alarmed her for the safety of some letters and notes of hers, which, she well knew, Melvyn had the precaution to keep, in order to make it impossible for her to betray him without running the risk of being betrayed herself. It was therefore painful to her to think that Melvyn was going to marry a young wife, who might gain access to his papers, and discover secrets relative to her, which might not be safe in her keeping. Full of this impression, she lost no time in writing to Melvyn on the subject, and stating that, as he was likely to become a husband and she a wife, since she had nearly resolved to accept the offers of an  
elderly

elderly man of high rank, as she had nearly outrun her fortune, she thought it advisable that they should make a mutual exchange of letters and notes, which letters and notes should be burnt by each party in the presence of a third person, as soon as received.

Melvyn had no objection at all to this arrangement, as there were letters of his in Sophia's hands, which he had often been afraid that she might, in a transport of rage, have shown, to the utter destruction of his character ; and he was the more ready to do this, because he knew that, even when her letters were returned, Sophia's good name was still in his power. Consequently he was not slow in informing her, that as he always carried letters of importance with him whithersoever he went, her letters, &c. should be sealed up, ready to return whenever he received his own.

As

Immediately on the arrival of this welcome answer, Sophia collected together all the letters and notes which she had ever received from Melvyn, and sent them to Melvyn at C——, by the hand of a person whom she could trust, desiring that Melvyn would burn them in the presence of that person, and return hers by the same hand.

On the 12th of February, 1809, this person arrived at C——, delivered the packet to Melvyn, saw its contents burnt, and received from him a promise, that on the evening of the 13th the packet for Miss Clermont should be sent to him, to take to London with him at six the next morning. Nor did Melvyn promise more than he really meant to perform; and on the morning of the 13th of February he collected faithfully all the promised manuscripts, and sealed them up together. He then walked out as usual, and when  
he

he returned he sat down and wrote the following letter to Sophia :

“ I have been walking out, and am returned home in a most horrible state of mind, and haunted by the remembrance of that injured angel, whom I by my artifices, aided by your infernal suggestions, drove from her home, her husband, and her children !—Did you think that I had been such a fool, Sophy? But greater fools were those who could believe the appearances raised against her ; and he (her husband) deserved to suffer for his folly and insensibility to the merit of such a woman. If I had not hated and loathed him, and pined till I was revenged on him for other causes, I should have hated him for his weak credulity and blindness ! Sophy, you must indulge me in talking on this subject, although I know that you hate it,  
and



and that the praise of Lady Shirley, though she is disgraced, is odious to your ear. But this is the last time I will so tease you; for I too must try to forget her.—Forget her! impossible! Now when I shut my eyes, I see that pure angelic expression! that soft, chaste, long, Madonna eyelid! —Well, I am glad that I never after I had accused her, met that eye of mild reproach! I, even I, could not have borne it, Sophy! Now to explain why I am so full of this subject this morning.

“I went into a shop just now, and as soon as I entered, an old woman screamed out ‘’Tis he! the wretch! the monster!’ and down she dropped in a fit; while I, though aware that some young women might have a right to call me a wretch, thought it very unlikely that an old woman should; and stood looking on with a face of great innocence, saying ‘The poor soul must  
have

have mistaken me for some one else.' At last, she ceased to sob; and opening her ill-looking eyes, fixed them on me, exclaiming, 'O thou vile man! I know you, Mr. Melvyn—I know you for the base destroyer of the reputation of my angel lady, of my betrayed Lady Shirley! But vengeance will overtake you!—Away! your sight destroys me!' And looking and feeling like a self-convicted culprit, I did obey her, and stole home as fast as possible;—for this just reprover was Mrs. Norris, the general's old servant; and, Sophy, I still hear her voice. But I could not have done it without help. And what dolts I had to deal with! If Sir Harry Turton had not been an idiot, could he have supposed that I should not have taken care to see that no one watched or followed me, when I was going to take a lady where I did, unless I meant to be observed?

observed? And would not Lord M——, if he thought at all, have known that before I put a lady under such circumstances into a coach, I should have looked about to be sure that there were no spies in a corner near? And would Lady Shirley, if conscious of guilt, have let the coachman know where she lived, and have been set down at her own door?—Was the *vulgar slang* about cant and hypocrisy, and *saints* being *sinners*,—was that to be believed and attended to, in contradiction to what I must call her consummate loveliness of life? I must lay down my pen.

“ *Evening.*

“ I have dined or rather drunk myself into some composure.—I conclude that my matrimonial scheme will be quite done up by old Norris; for the parents, before violent against it, will now be worse.—

Well,

Well, no matter—But it grows late—I must do up the parcel, and inclose your letters in this phrenised scrawl!—Forgive it; it shall, if I can help it, be my last on this subject.

“JOHN MELVYN.”

It was VALENTINE’S EVE; and Melvyn, having inclosed the packet in his letter, put the whole in a large piece of white paper; then sealed the envelope very curiously with three seals. And having done so, he gave it to his own man, in strict charge that he should deliver it himself into the hands of Sophia’s agent at such an inn.

But Melvyn’s man had other engagements: he therefore gave this important packet to the care of the footboy, who immediately sallied forth with it in one direction, while the valet went in another:  
and

and as he walked along, exhibited this tempting white paper parcel most conspicuously to the view of the passers-by, amongst which was a group of boys on the watch, as boys always are on Valentine's night, to snatch valentines : and this packet looked so like a valentine, or valentines, that its fate, especially as it was only guarded by a boy, was soon decided upon ; and in the twinkling of an eye the parcel disappeared out of the hand of its holder, and the boy who stole it vanished as speedily from the sight\*. Even his companions wondered at the celerity

\* Should this incident be thought improbable, I must beg leave to state that it is a *true* one :— A lady, a friend of mine, was carrying a packet of letters designed for London, (and to be sent by a private hand next day,) through the streets of Norwich on *St. Valentine's Eve*, when a boy suddenly snatched it and ran away with it ; and from

celerity with which he had vanished, and pursued him to his own home: but he was too cunning to go thither; and repairing to the house of a woman, to whose daughter, a pretty girl of fourteen, this hopeful boy had promised to bring all the valentines he could get,—he found his young favourite eagerly watching for him, her mother being gone out to tea, and with delighted alacrity they began to break the seals of a supposed valentine to “Miss Clermont.” But still another seal impeded the gratification of their curiosity; and they had only just opened it, and discovered to their great disappointment that it was nothing but a let-

that time to the present it has never been heard of! The contents of the packet were indeed different from that of the one mentioned above, as they were letters from a most admirable mother to as admirable children.

ter

ter containing opened letters and notes, when Norris, who was a lodger in the house, came down stairs, and luckily with her spectacles on. As soon as the young thief saw her, a feeling of conscious error, perhaps, caused him to endeavour to gather together and hide the papers, and this action made Norris suspect that all was not right : advancing therefore to the table, she sternly asked them what they were doing with those papers, and where they got them ; and as she did this, her eye glanced on the signature of “ John Melvyn,” and on the address to “ Miss Clermont !”

“What do I see?” cried Norris, instantly seizing Melvyn’s letter, and as many of the notes as her trembling hand could hold. But she had not read many lines, before she fell on her knees, and loudly thanked God for having made her the

means to restore the lost reputation of her master's child, and bring down vengeance on her enemies!"

"Child!" said she to the astonished boy, "I fear you did not come honestly by these; but it sometimes pleases Providence to use bad agents for good ends: and this may prove even to you the best night's work you ever did—for these papers will, I doubt not, clear the fame of a most injured lady, and you and I must set off this very night to the seat of the lord her husband, where we shall both be welcome."

The boy still sat in stupid astonishment not unmixed with fear; but the girl, having often heard Mrs. Norris talk of Lady Shirley and her wrongs, (for Norris believed Catherine the most injured of women,) had been reading some of Sophia's notes; and being acute enough to understand



stand immediately the consequence of the discovery of these papers, she eagerly told her young admirer, that Lord Shirley would probably give him a handsome reward for what he had done, and that he would not blame him for the little frolic which had been the means of his procuring them.

Mrs. Norris in the mean while was reading and weeping, and sometimes execrating the villany of the person who wrote. "And these wretches," cried she, "destroyed the peace and fame of my sweet young lady!—William, go for your father instantly; and let me have a post-chaise ordered this moment, for I will not sleep till I have seen the earl, even if I die the minute after—glad and contented to breathe my last in my old master's service, for it will be joy to him to see his poor child righted!"

To

To be brief : The parents were convinced that it was necessary for Norris to go to Lord Shirley and take their son with her ; and in an hour the good old woman was on her road to Lord Shirley's seat.

Though delayed on the road by not finding the people up at the inns, they reached the place of their destination by eight in the morning ; and Lord Shirley was informed that Mrs. Norris wished to see him on urgent business.

It was the day fixed for Lord Shirley's departure ; and he was trying, in the delightful idea of restoration to the presence of the being he loved best on earth, to forget the painful consciousness that, perhaps, to one half of the world he should appear a man contented to sit down under the sense of his own dishonour, and take back to his heart the beautiful wanton who had dishonoured him, because he had not  
strength

strength of mind to live without her. And while all the feelings of injured honour, and a jealous love of reputation indignantly arose at this contemplation of the subject, he felt agonized to think that, whatever was his opinion of Catherine's unblemished innocence, the name and fame of the wife of Lord Shirley, and the mother of Lord Shirley's children, would go down to posterity in at best a questionable light. And Lord Shirley sighed in the bitterness of a wounded spirit, though in a few days he hoped to clasp to his bosom the woman whom he idolized, rendered dearer to him by this long enforced separation.

At the moment of these mixed thoughts and feelings, the servant delivered a request to be admitted to his presence from the general's faithful old servant.

“Admit her instantly !” cried he, fearing  
ing

ing that something had happened to the general ; and Norris, followed by her young attendant, tottered into the room.

“Tell me, my good woman, instantly what has happened,” cried the earl, taking her hand, and leading her to a chair, for he found that she was too much agitated to speak.

“*Read ! read these !*” cried the good woman sobbing, “and bless God !”

Lord Shirley took the papers which she held out to him, and staggered to a seat ; when the well known characters of Sophia Clermont and the signature of Melvyn met his eye. He read Melvyn’s letter first, or rather attempted to read it ; for its contents were too overwhelming, too full of just reproaches to himself, to be read at once ; and rushing into the next room, he vented his mingled feelings of pleasure and pain, of thankfulness and self-

self-reproach, in alternate bursts of prayer and sobs of agony.

I will not attempt to follow him through all the various gradations of feeling which attended his perusal of Sophia's notes, commenting on, and thereby explaining, the means Melvyn took to lead Catherine into the suspicious situations which had destroyed her fame. Suffice, that the exculpation of Catherine was as complete as the most nice and jealous husband could desire, and the inculpation of Melvyn and Sophia Clermont as entire as their greatest enemies could wish. And there was nothing that gratitude could dictate, or munificence bestow, which Lord Shirley did not promise and secure to the faithful servant who had been instrumental in bringing about so desirable an event.

The first thing that Lord Shirley did when

he recovered from his agitation, was to send a copy of Melvyn's letter to his solicitor, to get it copied, and sent to Lord M—— and to the Duchess of C——, desiring that Lord M—— would take counsel's opinion, whether an action for a conspiracy against the countess would not lie against Melvyn and others; not so much from a wish to take vengeance on the calumniators of his wife, but as a means of making her wrongs and innocence better known to the world.

While the earl was thus employed, Melvyn was enduring, and had caused Sophia to share, all the apprehensions which they had so well deserved to experience: for, though the footboy kept his own secret concerning the loss of the packet, the person who was to receive it, having had strict orders not to return to London without it, went to Melvyn's lodgings to inquire

quire for it, when it was not arrived at eleven o'clock.

He met Melvyn at the door, who became excessively uneasy when he heard that a parcel which he sent at eight was not yet delivered ; and on interrogating his own valet, he was forced to own that he had intrusted it to the care of the foot-boy. The lad was immediately summoned ; and after much hesitation and confusion he owned the real fate of this important parcel, and Melvyn was almost in a state of distraction. What was to be done in such an emergency ? To cry the packet with a considerable reward for bringing it back appeared the wisest plan, and this was immediately put in practice ; but it is unnecessary to add that it was in vain.

The next day he offered a reward to any one who would give the slightest idea  
of



of the probable fate of the lost parcel : and the father of the girl for whose sake it had been stolen waited on Melvyn immediately, and informed him that the parcel with all its contents was by that time in the hands of Lord Shirley.

On hearing this, Melvyn could hardly be prevented from laying violent hands on his valet : he did knock down the poor foot-boy and tread on him with savage fury ; nor did he seem much disposed to show more mercy to himself : but recollecting that, though he would soon be unable to show his face in England, “ there was living out of Britain,” he resolved to set off for London directly inform Sophia himself of this decided ruin of their reputation, and, if she was so inclined, leave the kingdom with her for his companion.

He did so. And he arrived at her house  
most



most opportunely, as Lord M——, having received Lord Shirley's express early that morning when Sophia's old peer was with him, had communicated its contents to him; and the latter, seeing that Sophia had been the accomplice of the infamous Melvyn, wrote a note immediately, declining the honour of her hand and even of her acquaintance. But, as he gave no reason for this conduct, it remained for Melvyn to explain it : and Sophia, seeing that her expulsion from society was inevitable, and being involved in debt, was glad to escape from England, if possible, with Melvyn for a companion rather than go alone, and in a few days they were landed for the present at Jersey.

But before I proceed, I wish to narrate the retributive justice which, even in this world, overtook these wretched and guilty beings. The probable restoration of Lord  
and

and Lady Shirley to happiness, even greater than they had known before, revived all Melvyn's hate and all Sophia's jealousy ; and they very naturally vented those uneasy passions on each other, which they despaired now of venting on the innocent objects of them :—till at last, beggared by her extravagance and worn out by the violence of her temper, Melvyn turned Sophia out to the poverty which she deserved ; and she was forced to live upon the wages of infamy : while he, as he was going to keep an appointment which he had made with a married woman, was set upon by her husband and brother, and received so severe a blow on the head that he never recovered it, and died in all the agonies of fruitless remorse and guilty terrors.

Sophia, not long after, fell a victim to a blow which she received from a  
drunken

drunken libertine, whose mistress she was ; and that sense of a world to come, which she had successfully banished from her mind in life, returned in her last moments, only to add new horrors to death.

CHAP.

## CHAPTER X.

LORD Shirley thought it was expedient to send a letter to the general, informing him of these good tidings, before he himself set off, as the post would travel faster than he did. And having done that, Lord Shirley set off for Ireland with his children and their nurses. Their journey was as rapid and their voyage as favourable as travelling with children would admit of; and in as short a time as possible, though certainly not short enough to gratify the impatience of the earl, they reached Ireland, and the dark towers of Castle Rock rose to their view.—Lord Shirley had sent an outrider to say that he was coming,—yet still he beheld no Lucy or Lord Livesay

Livesay issuing from the Castle to meet him, or hailing him from its turrets; and his heart died within him when he drew near the very gates of the Castle, and yet was awaited and cheered by no sign of welcome! And he and the children were all alighted and in the Castle hall, before one face save that of servants met his impatient view.

At last, Lord Livesay with a forced smile and a tearful eye entered the apartment into which the servant led the way, and in a hoarse voice and hurried manner bade the earl welcome to Ireland.

“Welcome! welcome! And do you call this a welcome?” exclaimed Lord Shirley; while Lord Livesay was pressing the tired children in his arms and hiding his agitated face in their bosom. “Where is the general? where is my wife?—where is Catherine?”

“You

“ You will see her soon ; but she is ill, very ill.—Did you not get our letters?”

“ No ; I got no letters.”

“ How strange and unfortunate !” He said no more, for Lord Shirley could hear no more: and for a few moments his fears were so great, that they deprived him of the power of trying to ascertain how far those fears were founded. Lucy Merle now entered, and fancied that she had composed her spirits so far as to be able to meet the earl with calmness; but the moment she saw him and met his sad bewildered eye, she hastened towards him, and leaning her head on his shoulder sobbed aloud.

“ My dearest creature,” said Lord Livesay, gently withdrawing her from the agitated husband, “ we alarm our dear friend more than we ought. We hope, Shirley, that your angel wife is better.”

“ Indeed !”

“ Indeed !” replied Lord Shirley with a sort of smile that filled him with horror : then adding, “ But where is she ? let me see her, where is she ?”—he ran hastily up the stairs.

“ She is not there,—she is not up stairs,” cried Lucy.

“ Then she is not confined to her bed ?” said the earl, eagerly returning.—Before Lucy could answer, a door behind him opened, and the general appeared at it. Lord Shirley started, shuddered, and vainly endeavoured to approach him ;—and the general, finding that he too had flattered himself in thinking that he was sufficiently prepared for the interview, suddenly closed the door.

Lord Shirley did not attempt to follow him.—Lucy, who had left the room a minute, now returned to say that Lady Shirley was ready to see him ; and opening  
a door

a door on the ground-floor, she bade Lord Shirley enter. He immediately found himself breathing the air almost of a hot-house : and on a bed at the end of the room, and near the fire, he beheld what he could have fancied the ghost of Catherine Shirley. But that pale lip smiled welcome on him ; those meagre arms opened to receive him ; and scarcely conscious how he reached the couch, he felt himself folded to the bosom of his long-exiled wife.

“ But is it no delusion ?—is it indeed you ?” said Catherine, looking earnestly, anxiously, and fondly in his face.

Lord Shirley could not, dared not look on hers : the recollection of her injuries—the consciousness of her illness and her danger,—that illness brought on probably by agony of mind,—all came over him with such overwhelming force, that as he  
leaned



leaned his head on her pillow, and his arms dropped powerless from her waist, groans, deep groans alone proclaimed that sense and life had not both at once forsaken him.

“ Speak to me,—speak to me, my beloved !” cried Catherine : “ this dreadful silence kills me.”

“ Kills you !” exclaimed Lord Shirley, “ Kills you ! I know it,—yes—yes—I know that I have killed you ! O Catherine !—”

Lucy Merle now led in the children ; and Catherine, in the exquisite delight of seeing them and folding them to her heart, felt her attention for one moment turned from their unhappy father ; when, luckily for Lord Shirley’s reason, the sight of the unconscious twins clasped to the bosom of that mother from whom he had so long unjustly separated them, had such a powerful

powerful effect on his feelings, that tears burst with hysterical violence from his eyes, and restored him to perception and to calmness. But the sight of their father's agony so terrified the children, that Catherine was forced to resign them to their nurses; and Lucy led them away, promising to bring them back when they were appeased.

“The poor things do not know me yet!” said Catherine: “But they will soon.” And as she spoke cheerfully, Lord Shirley tried to believe that all hope was not over. And as he thought this, he ventured to gaze earnestly on her changed but still beautiful face.

“O my love!” cried Catherine, “how kind, how bountiful has Providence been to me! He restores to me my husband, my children, and my reputation, all—all in a few short hours! Precious, indeed,  
are

are they all to my soul! but most precious my husband and my children! Yet if it be thy will," she added, raising her eyes to heaven, "thou knowest that I am willing to resign them."

"To resign us? Cruel Catherine! how can you talk of resignation to such a trial?"

"Because, my dearest lord, I have always considered this world only as a state of probation for another, and that trials are to be looked upon as favours from the Giver of all good, if borne with thankfulness and endured with patience, and as touchstones of our real faith in the mercy and goodness of Providence.—To have died, my beloved Shirley, with fortitude and resignation, when I was an alien to your heart, an exile from you and my dear children, and lost to reputation and to happiness, would have been no proof of my love and gratitude to my Creator ;  
but

but to be willing to obey his summons when every thing that is most precious in life is mine again,—*that* is a sacrifice worthy to be offered by a Christian spirit ; and, hard as the struggle is, I *hope* I shall be enabled to prove myself equal to it.”

“ But I am not able to endure it, nor ever shall be. Talk not thus, Catherine, unless you wish to distract me ! I cannot part with you ;—dear as you always were, you are far far dearer to me now that I hold you thus pale, thus meagre, to my heart, than when I held you there in all the pride of health and beauty ! And can you talk or think of being willing to leave me ?—True, I do not deserve you ;—true, I never did deserve you. But, Oh ! to think what a happy being I was when I arose today ! In a few hours I expected to see you, blooming, gay, tender and happy !

py! And I find you—" Here his voice failed him, and he was forced to cease his and mournful eloquence.

"And you find me," said Catherine gently, "not well, not blooming,—but tender, and happy. For, while consciousness is spared me, I must be happy while I see you and my dear infants, and reflect that every blot on my fair fame it has pleased Heaven to wipe away.—Besides, you know that while there is life, there is hope."

"And do you really hope, Catherine?"

"At times I do; and so do all my friends. And will you, my dear lord, be the only one to insist upon despairing? Remember, we usually expect what we wish; and if you are so contented to despair, I shall suspect that you do not wish to hope."

Catherine tried to smile while she said this, but she could not do it. There was an expression in Lord Shirley's countenance that she could not endure; and complaining that she was rather faint, while she closed her eyes to shut out his wild and agonized look, she laid her head on the pillow and begged to be left with Lucy Merle.

When Lord Shirley had left them, Catherine said, " My dear friend, I feel that it is the will of my Creator that I should suffer greatly in my departure hence. My own sufferings either of body or mind I could bear, and I trust have borne with patience; but the sight of what my husband feels, and the thought of what he will still feel, is what at present I cannot bear with becoming resignation; but I trust that I shall be enabled by prayer to obtain the necessary fortitude, and that  
help

help will not be withheld when most I need it.—Now, Lucy, go to my dear lord, and tell him that I am trying to compose myself awhile, that I may be better able to enjoy his society.” Lucy, too full of heart to utter one word, only kissed her now crimson cheek, and withdrew.

## CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Lord Shirley left Catherine's apartment, he was met in the hall by Lord Livesay, with the general leaning on his arm ; and the latter was now able to utter some kind of welcome, though the earl could not help feeling that the affectionate cordiality which had once subsisted between him and his venerable relation was, on the side of the general, gone, probably for ever. Nor could he wonder that it was so, as General Shirley had always done that justice to Catherine which he unfortunately had denied her.

Lord Shirley, after his first emotions on this meeting had subsided, had innumerable



merable questions to ask relative to Catherine and her illness.—“ But why,” asked he, “ was she not instantly removed on her first seizure, from this cold situation to a more genial air ?”

“ Because she was at first too weak to bear the exertion.”

“ But what advice has she ?”

“ A young physician, but of considerable eminence, has been here a week, whom we sent for express from Dublin.”

“ How long has she been ill ?”

“ Dangerously, only a fortnight. -And you see that by letting her sleep over the kitchen, and by flues, we have contrived to make her breathe an air so warm, that, even could she be moved to a warmer climate, she would be less injured by staying where she is.—In short, my lord,” said Lucy solemnly, “ we have done all that human means could do, and we must  
humbly

humbly and confidingly leave the rest to Providence. But her poor mother died, you know, of—”

“ I know it, I know it,” interrupted Lord Shirley striking his forehead with his hand, and walking up and down the room,—“ and *her* complaint was hastened if not brought on by uneasiness of mind.”

“ But our dear Lady Shirley’s uneasiness is now at an end,” kindly observed Lord Livesay ; “ and as she has so much youth and so much strength, we have great reason to hope.”

Lucy smiled affectionately on the well-meant soothing ; while Lord Shirley exclaimed, “ But what says the physician ?” And nothing but seeing him that instant could pacify his emotion.

That gentleman was gone to get a few hours repose, as he was to sit up that night. Luckily, however, he was already  
up

up again and dressed, when the servant went to inform him that the earl wished to see him ; and he obeyed his summons in the room appropriated to him.

Not all his kind wish of speaking peace to the agonized apprehensions of Lord Shirley could allow him to give his interrogator the degree of hope he desired ; and Lord Shirley returned to his sympathizing companions with a countenance of the deepest dejection.

Soon after, with Dr. ——'s permission, Lord Shirley obeyed Catherine's summons, and hastened again to her bed-side. He found her quite calm ; but he almost started as he beheld the ghastly paleness of her cheek.

“ My dear lord,” said she, extending to him her thin and burning hand, “ I have much to say to you, much of importance in my opinion to your welfare and mine,  
both

both here and hereafter; and I have great comfort in the thought that you love me too well to deny me what may be my very last request."

"Deny you! deny you anything!" replied Lord Shirley in a voice nearly inarticulate from emotion; "O Catherine!"

"No—I do not think it likely that you will," she answered with a smile of former days. "Now then to prefer my petition. In a short time I am going to take the Sacrament, and it is my wish that you and all my friends should take it with me. But how can I do this, unless I prove to myself and to others that you do, the same—that we forgive all those who have ever trespassed against us, as we hope to have our own trespasses forgiven?"

"I see what you are going to say, Catherine,"

therine," cried Lord Shirley, rising : " but I charge you to recollect that Justice is a virtue as well as Mercy."

" True ; but leave the infliction of it to the Almighty. Frail man, who needs so much mercy himself, should always be eager to show it to others ; and I conjure you to forgive, as I do, the crimes of Melvyn and that unhappy woman against us, as I myself forgive them."

" Forgive them ! Yes, I do, I trust, forgive them : still it is a duty I owe the public to bring them to punishment, that they may be deprived of their power of injuring others."

" But if you did *not* forgive them you could do no more.—And how can you be sure that you do indeed forgive them, when your actions towards them are those of unforgiveness and revenge ? O ! my dearest Shirley ! we but deceive ourselves,

and our hearts are strangers to real forgiveness, when we do not by some overt action *prove* that we forgive.—I grant you that they ought to be prevented from doing further injury: and this will be done sufficiently by the publication of the letters and notes, a step necessary not only to expose them, but to clear my sullied name; and that will be sufficient to drive them from society. O do not then, do not, I conjure you by that holy one who died for *them* as well as for *us*,—do not call down upon their heads the penalties of the law, but let them depart into obscurity unpunished except by the consciousness of universal contempt.”

“It cannot be, because it ought not to be; and I am sure that the general will not consent if *I* do—it was such atrocious, such almost unnatural wickedness!”

“It

“ It was wickedness which certainly could not have succeeded as it did, had I done my duty. I ought not, I fear, to have married you with a secret on my mind that I could not reveal ; and however repugnant to my feelings, I ought to have told you every thing relative to my meetings with Melvyn as soon as ever I saw you, and then you could not have been led to suspect me by the artifice of others.”

“ I cannot bear to hear you blame yourself,” cried Lord Shirley : “ *I* and I only was to blame. For who that knew you as I did, except my guilty self, could have believed you criminal even for one moment ?—and never, never before, did so pure and holy a being suffer so much as you have done.”

“ My mother,” replied Catherine, “ deserved

served more than I did, and suffered as much, and longer."

"Your mother! O talk not so, my beloved! Your mother lived many happy years with a husband who deserved her, for he truly appreciated her worth: and Catherine, she lived to witness and enjoy the early virtues of her matchless child. Your mother suffer like you! No, no:—for William Shirley was not such a husband as I was. Noble, tender, faithful, consistent creature! how must he have been consoled, when he held her dying and dead in his fond arms, to know that his heart had ever felt towards her the same undiminished esteem and love, and that he had never caused her to endure the greatest pang an affectionate woman can know—the consciousness of having lost the confidence of the husband of her heart!



heart ! I tell you, Catherine, your mother was blest in life, and blest in death ! and you—”

“ Shall be blest in death, whatever I may have been in life,” said Catherine solemnly, “ if you will grant me the boon I ask.—O my dear lord ! how do we know but that when these wretched persons are told, as I entreat they may be, that their poor victim forgave and prayed for them,—how do we know, I say, what effect on their benighted hearts this proof of the power of the Christian faith may not produce ! Who knows but that their awakened consciences may lead them to the feet of their Creator ? O Shirley ! would it not be a sweet, a glorious thing, in the exertion of *our* Christian duty, to teach such sinners *theirs* ? And if by my death I can hope to save these souls from  
perdition,

perdition, think you that I can consider my death otherwise than as a blessing?"

As she said this, the eyes of Catherine were rendered so brilliant by the pious hope that her lips uttered, and her voice and manner became so irresistibly persuasive, that Lord Shirley's resolution gave way, and he was moved by her entreaties, however unconvinced by her arguments; for he believed the hearts of Melvyn and Sophia incapable of being moved to penitence, even by virtue and piety like Catherine's.

"You have conquered," said he at length, when the various emotions to which her words had given birth had in a degree subsided—"you have conquered—I will withdraw the prosecution; and these unhappy wretches shall know that they owe my lenity to the entreaties of their victim."

victim." But this last word was almost inaudible.

Catherine, on hearing what he said, exclaimed, "My God, I thank thee!" in a tone so fervent and affecting, that Lord Shirley was again moved to salutary tears. And after bestowing on him the fondest and tenderest caresses, Catherine desired the chaplain to be called; and that the general, Lord Livesay, and Lucy might be summoned to her apartment.

"I have carried my point with Shirley," cried Catherine as soon as she saw her grandfather: "and now, my dear sir, you can hesitate no longer."

"I do not hesitate," replied the general.

"Then now," added Catherine, "with what satisfied hearts we may partake together of this holy rite!"

As soon as the ceremony was over,  
which

which Catherine alone went through with any thing like firmness, she grasped Lord Shirley's hand, and said, " 'This, my dear lord, ought to be considered as our second wedding feast ; but of more value than the first, as I trust that it secures our eternal re-union, ' where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' "

Then, seeing that Lord Shirley and her other auditors were too much distressed to speak, she urged her lord and the general to leave her, declaring her wish to compose herself for the night. And after a farewell prolonged almost to agony by apprehensive affection, they slowly and reluctantly withdrew.

As the door was about to close on Lord Shirley, Catherine raised herself on the bed, and looked fondly after him.—  
" Let me see him as long as I can," she  
exclaimed ;

exclaimed ; “ and but for his sake I would not suffer him from my sight while my eyes are able to behold him. But this were selfishness ; and it were better perhaps for him that we should meet no more, and that this parting were our last.” Then hearing Lucy sob, she said, “ Forgive me, Lucy, I forgot that you were present ; I thought that I had been alone, or I should not have talked thus. Now, give me my last dose of medicine, and leave me, I charge you, to my nurse and my physician.”

Though Lord Shirley was not allowed to remain with Catherine, no bed received him, nor could he even try to rest, though Lucy had ordered him an apartment at the other end of the Castle, that he might hear no noise ; and the sound of his restless footstep was constantly heard breaking the silence of night.

Fre-

Frequently did he leave his chamber to make inquiries concerning Catherine. But he learnt nothing new or satisfactory, till the general burst into his room in the morning, and with a countenance of pleasure, though his eyes were filled with tears, exclaimed, "Joy, joy, Lionel! we really begin to hope now! She is up,—she is dressed,—and looking so well and happy! It will do your heart good to see her!"

It was too much for the exhausted nerves of the earl; and staggering to the bed, it was some minutes before he could rise superior to the overwhelming and sudden succession of hope to despair.

"But may I not go to her?" said he at length.

"Go to her? To be sure! she has sent me to fetch you." And in a moment, refreshed, and unconscious of the night he had passed, the now relieved husband  
found

found himself in the chamber of Catherine.

She was indeed up, and dressed ; and with a countenance radiant with smiles, and eyes lighted up by the brilliant colour on her cheeks, while she turned looks of love on her children, who were playing on the ground beside her, and Lord Livesay was watching Lucy's countenance, in order to read in it, if possible, whether hope or fear was to be the result of this apparent amendment.

Lord Shirley could not speak when he saw her, but his countenance spoke volumes.

“ There,” said Catherine, rising to meet him, and with more strength than she had exhibited for days, “ there comes my best and true physician. It is his presence, and that of those dear ones, that has done this. They are the medicines I  
wanted ;

wanted ;—it was for them that I pined—I have them, and all is well again. But you came just in time ; had you delayed even a day longer, you would have been too late.”

As she said this, the general glanced his eye towards Lucy, and saw almost with anger that *her* look was as mournful and desponding as ever ; and he rather pettishly exclaimed, “ Surely, Miss Merle, you must think Lady Shirley better ? I wish the physician was not gone to bed, that he might confirm our hopes.”

“ She does seem better, certainly,” replied Lucy gravely.

“ Seems, Lucy ! Nay, I am—I know not seems,” replied Catherine, smiling. “ But really you look so solemnly, and are such a *memento mori*, that I must order you away. I declare, if she were not an engaged woman, Shirley, I should  
suspect



suspect Lucy wished me gone that she might succeed me in your heart, so averse does she appear to believe me better."

This was a pleasantry so unlike the usual manner and style of Catherine, that poor Lucy was more certain than before that Catherine was under the influence of fever; and she dared not hope herself, while she shuddered to see how deluded and how happy were the husband and the grandfather.

"How well I look! do I not, Shirley?" said Catherine, "such a cosmetic is happiness! O Shirley! the first glance of your kind eye, the eye of former days, was sufficient to revive me. 'He loves me! he loves me as well as ever!' said I to myself; and that dear, that precious glance, haunted me through the night. I saw it in my dreams when I slept, and when I  
awoke

awoke it seemed to beam health and happiness upon me."

"My dearest love, you talk so much that you will exhaust yourself," said Lord Shirley, who gazed on her sweet and tender countenance with unutterable fondness.

"Dear Lady Shirley, you must be more quiet," observed Lucy, "or you will suffer for it."

"Hush, raven, hush!" replied Catherine, playfully putting her hand to Lucy's lips.

Lucy held it there some time; then relinquishing it, she burst into tears.

"Well," said Catherine, "if I did not know that joy has its tears as well as grief, Lucy's streaming eyes would depress me; but I will not look at her. No: she is the dark sky; but you, my lord, and my

my smiling children there, are the rainbow that illumines it ; and who would look at the gloom, that could see the many-tinted iris ?—Not I indeed.”

Here she paused ; for, in spite of her efforts, she now spoke with difficulty.

“ Raise me up, my dearest lord,” she said, after a pause, “ raise me up, and I shall breathe better.”

Lord Shirley did raise her, and so high upon his bosom, that her lip as she raised her head nearly rested on his. At this moment, Catherine fixed her eyes on Lord Shirley’s, with an expression of tenderness which went to his very soul.

“ I am better, much better now,” she faintly articulated. Then, pressing her lips to his, her head sunk upon his breast, and in a few moments the wretched  
husband

husband discovered, that he had entertained hope only to feel more acutely the poignancy of despair, and that he held nothing but a corpse in his arms.

THE END.

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